TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents >
Part H. Cultural Competence, Spirituality, and the Arts a... >
Chapter 27. Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World >
Section 4. Strategies and Activities for Reducing Racial Pre... >
Main Section - Introduction, what, why, when, who, and how. >

<<< BACK TO TOC

Strategies and Activities for Reducing Racial Prejudice and Racism

Main Section

Contributed by Chris Hampton and Kien Lee Edited by Bill Berkowitz and Jerry Schultz

What is racial prejudice and racism?

Why is it important to reduce racial prejudice and racism?

How can you reduce racial prejudice and racism?

You're at a restaurant with a group of coworkers after work. You're telling them about your decision to buy a house in Western Heights and how excited you were. One of them says to you, "Are you sure want to move there? I hear that there is a lot of crime in that area, you know, robberies, drugs, and even murder. It's a Black neighborhood, you know, that's probably why. Did you consider Eastern Heights? You may fit in there better! It's a nice middle-class, White suburban neighborhood. Definitely no crime there, if you know what I mean." You're dumbfounded. You couldn't believe that someone is actually saying this. You start to tell her that she's wrong and asked her what made her think that way.

You thought some more about what happened on your way home. You realized that your colleague is but one person and who knows how many people out there think like her. It helps to change people's racial stereotypes and attitudes, but the only way real change can come about was if our institutions and systems implemented policies that promote racial equality. You suddenly felt angry. What if redlining still goes on because real estate companies are filled with people who think like your colleague? What policies exist to stop such institutionalized prejudice?

The above encounter at the restaurant is an example of racial prejudice. Redlining (not selling a property to someone based on his or her race), which is illegal, is an act of racism or institutionalized prejudice. It is important to understand the distinction between racial prejudice and racism because they are affected differently by issues related to power and, therefore, require different levels of involvement and effort to address.

There are many forms of prejudice and oppression, not just based on race, but on gender, class, sexual orientation, etc. This section does not attempt to deal with all the possible forms. The strategies and activities described here for addressing racial prejudice and racism can, however, provide ideas for dealing with other forms of discrimination. As you work on addressing such inequities, think also about ways to prevent them by encouraging and establishing inclusive practices right from the start. Imagine that this work resembles two sides of a coin. One side represents the negative values and practices you are against. The other side represents the positive values and practices you are for. In other words, start thinking about building inclusive communities (see Chapter 27 section 11 on Building Inclusive Communities) while fighting the "isms" that exist in our society.

What is racial prejudice?

To be racially prejudiced means to have an unfavorable or discriminatory attitude or belief towards someone else or

another group of people primarily on the basis of skin color or ethnicity. For example, John is prejudiced because he believes that the new Hmong refugees in his community are stupid and barbaric because they kill chickens in their backyard. He has reported this to the local police many times.

What do you think should be done in this situation? One possibility is to invite John and Cha (his Hmong neighbor) to a meeting to help John understand the Hmong culture and to help Cha understand the state laws and regulations about killing animals in your home. The meeting should be facilitated by someone who has experience with conflict management and is deemed credible by both John and Cha. This attempt could result in change at the individual level.

What is racism?

When racial prejudice is supported by institutions and laws, racism is present. For example, when the Hmong neighbor, Cha, is arrested and put in jail for killing chickens in the backyard and no attempt is made to understand why he did it or to explain the laws to him (because he did not speak English), racism is present.

What do you think should be done in this situation? One possibility is to invite the police chief and other officers to a discussion about how the newcomers to the community are affecting law enforcement. It is likely that they have tried to explain the laws to the newcomers so that these complaints can stop, but it's not working because of cultural and language barriers. You might want to try and work with the police and local Hmong leaders to develop a strategy for increasing the police department's cultural competence and at the same time, increase the newcomers' understanding about the laws in this country. This attempt could result in change at the institutional level.

While we can never been entirely free of racial prejudice, we have to be able to identify and address racism because it perpetuates the unearned privileges of some and imposes undeserved restrictions on others. The economic well-being of a group of people is intertwined with racism and unless it is addressed intentionally and thoroughly, a community building effort will not reach its full potential.

Racial prejudice and racism have most been perpetrated in the U.S. by people of European descent against various other groups, such as African-Americans or Latinos. However, because of the shifts in our communities' demographics in some parts of the U.S., racial prejudice and racism also lead to tensions between people of non-European descent, such as between African Americans and Asian Americans. As the U.S. becomes more diverse and the world's residents more mobile, we must be prepared to act in order to reduce the potential for hostility due to differences in our physical traits and other characteristics.

No matter what culture or part of the world you're from, you've seen the results of racial prejudice and racism-even if you've never directly felt it directed towards yourself. The results of racial prejudice and racism can be seen everywhere: stereotypes, violence, underfunded schools, unemployment, police brutality, shabby housing, a disproportionate number of African-American men on death row, and many other ways. Racial prejudice and racism can be found in many different areas of society: in the media, in service organizations, in the workplace, in neighborhoods, at school, in local government, on your block-in virtually every area of daily life.

Why is it important to reduce racial prejudice and racism?

Here are some further reasons why racial prejudice and racism should be reduced:

- They impede or prevent the victim of racism from achieving his or her full potential as a human being.
- They impede or prevent the victim of racism from making his or her fullest contribution to society.
- They impede or prevent the person or group engaging in racist actions from benefiting from the potential contributions of their victim, as a result, they weaken the community as a whole.
- They increase the present or eventual likelihood of retaliation by the victim of racist actions.
- They go against many of the democratic ideals upon which the United States and other democracies were founded.
- Racism is illegal, in many cases.

Racial prejudice and racism feed on each other. If racial prejudice is not reduced, it could lead to racism, and it racism is not addressed, it could lead to more prejudice. This is why strategies to address oppression on the basis of race should be thorough and multifaceted so that both individual attitudes and institutionalized practices are affected.

In addition, here are some examples for why racial prejudice and racism should be addressed in your community building effort if more than one racial or ethnic group is involved:

1. Every participant in your effort has his or her own understanding of the world and how it works. The European American residents in the neighborhood don't understand why the new immigrants from Guatemala have to stand at the street corner to get work (they are commonly referred to as day laborers). They think it is because they are either "illegal" or too lazy to find full-time jobs. Part of the problem is that the residents have not had the opportunity to debunk these stereotypes through direct interaction and contact with the day laborers and to hear their stories.
2. Every participant in your effort is polite, respectful, and empathetic towards each other, and understands that in

order to address a common concern, they all have to work together; yet, they have not been able to engage a representative from the African American group in their community. It helps to understand why African Americans have traditionally been "left out" and how important it is to keep finding ways to engage them.

3. The board of directors of a local community center gets together to discuss ways to improve the center so that it is more welcoming to people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. They come up with ideas such as hiring more culturally diverse staff, posting notices in different languages, hosting food festivals, and celebrating various cultural events. It helps the participants to understand that even though they are taking the first steps to becoming culturally sensitive, their institutional policies may still be racist because they have not included anyone from the various racial and ethnic groups to participate in the strategic planning process, thereby not sharing their power.

Addressing racial prejudice and racism also means dealing with racial exclusion and injustice. Ultimately, this means that your community building effort is promoting democracy, a value of the United States and its Constitution.

In other words, there are both moral and sometimes legal reasons to act against racism. There are also strong pragmatic reasons as well. Racial prejudice and racism can harm not only the victims, but also the larger society, and indirectly the very people who are engaging in the acts. What's more, some important new research suggests that in some cases, racist actions can cause physiological harm to the victims. For example, a recent review of physiological literature concludes:

> "Interethnic group and intraethnic group racism are significant stressors for many African-Americans. As such, intergroup and intragroup racism may play a role in the high rates of morbidity and mortality in this population." (Clark, Anderson, Clark, and Williams, 1999).

While we try not to moralize on the Community Tool Box, let's face it - racial prejudice and racism are just plain wrong.

How can you reduce racial prejudice and racism?

While we try in the Community Tool Box to offer easy, step-by-step instructions for community work, changing a group of people's prejudiced attitudes and an institution's racist actions isn't so simply carried out and it doesn't happen overnight. Reducing racial prejudice and racism is a complex task that varies from community to community, so it doesn't lend itself well to simple, 1-2-3 solutions that can be adopted and applied without having a thorough understanding of the context and environment. Something like this takes knowing your community well and choosing strategies that best fit your community's needs, history, context, energies, and resources.

With that in mind, we offer a variety of activities and strategies you can conduct in combating racial prejudice and racism so that you can decide which of these tactics might work best in your workplace, school, neighborhood, and community.

NOTE! None of these activities or strategies alone will lead to sustainable change at the individual, institutional, or community levels. In order for such change to occur, you have to take actions that will allow you to consistently effect the different levels over a long period of time. Before you decide on the best activities and strategies, do the following:

• Learn about your community (e.g., what groups live there, what has been		**Note:** Appropriate structures and processes need to be set up in the community to implement these activities. See Chapter 27 Section 11 on Building Inclusive Communities for suggestions

the nature of their relationships, what incidents have occurred in the past due to racial prejudice or racism).
- Document activities in your community that reflect racial prejudice or racism. Documentation will show proof that there is a problem, especially when the community is in denial that racism exists. You can learn more about setting up a documentation process from the Center for Democratic Renewal at www.igc.org/pra/cdr/cdrmonre.
- Invite a group of people to participate in the planning process, if appropriate (e.g., the advocates who always take action, the representatives of each group, the people who are affected).
- Understand the depth of the problem (e.g., it's a new problem because of a group of newcomers, it's an old problem that won't go away).
- Identify and understand the kinds of policies that may need to be challenged.
- Determine the short-term and long-term, if any, goals of your strategy (e.g., change people's attitudes and/or change an institutional policy).
- Consider how far the selected strategy(ies) will take your community (e.g., initial awareness or elected officials from the underrepresented groups).
- Consider what existing resources you can build on and what additional assistance or resources you may need (e.g., anti-racism training, funding, or buy-in from the mayor).
- Consider how much time you have (e.g., are you responding to a crisis that needs to be dealt with immediately, to curb a festering issue, or to promote the value of diversity).
- Review your strategies to ensure that they deal with racial prejudice and racism at the individual, community, and institutional levels, and they link dialogue to action.

Things You Can Do In The Workplace: From Reducing Racial Prejudice To Reducing Racism

In presenting the ideas below about what you can do to reduce racial prejudice and racism, you will notice a double-headed arrow in between blocks of text. This arrow signifies that the efforts to reduce racial prejudice and racism are not independent, but supportive of each other. The left side of the column are ideas for reducing racial prejudice and the right side column contain suggestions for reducing racism.

Actively recruit and hire a racially and ethnically diverse staff. See Chapter 8: Hiring and Training Key Staff for more information. While it's not enough just to fill your staff with a rainbow of people from different backgrounds, representation from a variety of groups is an important place to start. Contact minority organizations, social groups, networks, media, and places where people of different ethnic and cultural groups congregate or access information. If you use word-of-mouth as a recruitment tool, spread the word to members of those groups, or key contact people. Also, consider writing an equal-opportunity policy for hiring and promoting staff.	*Actively recruit culturally and ethnically diverse board members, executives, and managers.* Racial prejudice can be reduced if the staff becomes diverse and raises the awareness of each other, but racism is reduced when power is shared by the leadership. In order to move beyond racial prejudice and ensure inclusiveness, your organization's board members and executives should reflect the communities or constituencies it serves. For instance, one group decided to reserve a certain number of slots on its governing board for representatives of the cultural and ethnic groups in the community.
Talk to the people of color on your staff and ask them what barriers or attitudes they face at work. Examine your newsletter or other publications and look out for negative portrayals, exclusion, or stereotypes. Find out how you can improve your workplace for members from diverse racial and ethnic groups that work there. This will not only give you some practical ideas about what you need to work on, but it will also signify that the needs of every group is taken seriously. Look around at any artwork you have in your offices.	*Form a permanent task force or committee dedicated to forming and monitoring a plan for promoting inclusion and fighting racism in your workplace.* Racial prejudice is reduced by developing relationships and ensuring that materials are culturally sensitive, but racism is reduced when there is a permanent task force or committee that becomes part of the governance structure to ensure inclusive and just institutional policies.

Are any groups represented in a stereotypical way? Is there diversity in the people portrayed? For example, if all the people in the clip art used in your newsletter are European Americans, you should make an effort to use clip art that shows a bigger variety of people.	

Things You Can Do In The Media: From Reducing Racial Prejudice To Reducing Racism

Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper or contact your local TV and radio station when the coverage is biased or when there is no coverage at all. See Chapter 24, Section 4. The media plays a powerful role in conveying messages to the public. Racial prejudice exists in the media if, for instance, the reporters always reveal the cultural or ethnic background of a group of loitering youth when they are persons of color, but not otherwise. Writing a letter or contacting the local media stations will help increase their staff's awareness about the implications of the prejudiced way in which they cover the news. *Contact the local media and organize presentations.* You can contact and organize presentations to educate the staff about the values and traditions of diverse groups and help them understand the negative implications of their coverage related to race and ethnicity.	*Organize a coalition of leaders from diverse communities and from the local media groups to discuss how they can work together to address the way people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are presented in the media.* Having a long-term vision of how the community and media representatives can work together will help address racism at the institutional level. In order to do this, it is advisable to organize the community leaders and media representatives separately to discuss their issues and then facilitate a meeting between them. This will provide you and the facilitator a chance to know about the concerns and challenges before convening everyone. *Pressure the local media organizations to develop and enforce policies for hiring staff from different racial and ethnic background.* You can help broker relationships between the media organizations and organizations that serve a specific cultural or ethnic group (e.g., NAACP, National Council of La Raza) so that networks can be developed to distribute job announcements.

In order to get information about how to cover different cultural and ethnic groups, media representatives can seek advice from the following:
Asian American Journalists Association at www.aaja.org
National Association of Hispanic Journalists at www.nahn.org
South Asian Journalists Association at www.saja.org
Native American Journalists Association at office@NAJA.com
National Association of Black Journalists at www.nabj.org

Things You Can Do in the Schools: From Reducing Racial Prejudice to Reducing Racism

Form a diversity task force or club. Recognize holidays and events relating to a variety of cultural and ethnic groups. This can be done in a school or university setting. Your diversity group can sponsor panel discussions, awareness activities, and cultural events to help prevent racism. Observing and doing educational activities about events like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday and other dates of significance to minority groups provides an opportunity for students to learn about the history of different cultural and ethnic groups and reduce misinformed or inaccurate perceptions. *Conduct field trips to historical places that represent struggles against racism or places that embody the values and traditions of another group of people.*	*Work to include anti-racism education in your school's curriculum. Develop a strategy to change racist policies in your school.* Recognize the traditions of other cultural and ethnic groups and developing relationships will reduce racial prejudice. Examine and change school policies that perpetuate exclusion of some cultural or ethnic groups. Develop procedures for dealing with racist acts and provide incentives (e.g., extra credits, special recognition) for efforts to promote cross-racial understanding. Lobby your school board to make changes or additions to the curriculum to teach anti-racism and to provide seed grants to teachers or instructors to help them conduct research and activities about racism and to promote anti-racist values and principles. Examine the recruitment, application, and admissions process for students, teachers, and staff from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Examples:
St. Francis De Sales Central Elementary Cleanup Campaign
In Morgantown, West Virginia, a convenience store had been painted with racist skinhead graffiti. After their teacher showed them a video on how another town had fought hate, a 6th grade class at St. Francis De Sales Central Elementary decided that if the graffiti was left alone, it would give the impression that the community didn't care about racism. The kids got together and painted over the graffiti, earning them the thanks of the state Attorney General and publicizing their point.

Toronto Coalition Against Racism
In the summer of 1993, Toronto experienced a rise in increasingly violent racism, much of which was directed at Tamil immigrants. Much of the violence was being done by neo-Nazis. Eventually, a large protest was held, with 3,000 people led by the Tamil community chanting "Immigrants In! Nazis Out!"The people who organized the protest went on to form the Toronto Coalition Against Racism. TCAR is a coalition of 50 community-based anti-racist and social justice organizations. According to its web site, TCAR has been involved in many community actions since forming, including:

- Opposing a ban placed on Filipino youth from entering a local mall
- Working with the Somali community to oppose harassment by security guards and landlords at a housing complex
- Mobilizing the public through forums and actions in defense of immigrant and refugee rights
- Supporting the Tamil Resource Center as it struggled to rebuild its library and office after a firebombing in May 1995

Things You Can Do in Your Neighborhood: Reducing Racial Prejudice to Reducing Racism

Welcome all newcomers. Make "safe zone" signs or stickers. Form a committee to welcome anyone who moves into your neighborhood regardless of what they look like. Send representatives from your committee or neighborhood association over to the new person's house with flowers, a fruit basket, or some other small gift and say, "We're glad you're living here. We welcome you. "Some neighborhoods have made small signs or stickers for their homes that read, "We welcome good neighbors of all traditions, backgrounds, and faiths." These stand in contrast to the small signs	*Identify and change policies that are exclusive and maintain the status quo.* Making someone feel a part of your neighborhood helps to reduce racial prejudice. Addressing redlining (the illegal practice of a lending institution denying loans or restricting their number for certain areas of a community) reduces racist policies. Organize a committee of lawyers, real-estate agents, lending institutions, and community and civil rights leaders to conduct a study and present the facts to the local government. If there is a neighborhood

in many yards that warn would-be intruders of the particular security system they've had installed. Write articles about different cultures and their traditions in the neighborhood newsletter or newspaper. Place advertisements about different cultural celebrations.	association or council, consider if it is representative of the neighborhood's demographics and diversity. If not, develop strategies for engaging leaders (formal and informal) from the underrepresented groups. See Chapter 27 Section 10 on Culture, Social Organization, and Leadership for ideas on outreach and information about leadership in different cultures.

Things You Can Do in Your Community: Reducing Racial Prejudice to Reducing Racism

Organize a cleanup or rebuilding campaign to erase racist graffiti or eliminate vandalism. Put up "Hate Free Zones" signs in the community. Doing something as a community to repair physical damage done by racism shows that the people in your town won't stand for such displays of hatred. It also can attract media attention to your cause and put a positive spin on a negative situation.	*Organize a city-wide coalition of community leaders made up of representatives from the different cultural and ethnic groups, as well as different community sectors (e.g., police, schools, businesses, local government) to examine their existing policies and determine what needs to change.* Doing something as a group of residents demonstrate the individuals' commitment to reduce prejudice. Creating a governing body that represents institutional leaders helps to reduce racism at the institutional level. Reviewing hiring and contracting policies in the city government will help change institutional norms that could be perpetuating economic disparities. *Identify and support new candidates from different racial and ethnic groups to run for city council and other community-wide governing bodies.* Conducting candidate forums and voter registration drives will increase residents' knowledge about the candidates and what they stand for, and increase the candidates' accountability to their constituents should they win.

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- Mobilizing the public through forums and actions in defense of immigrant and refugee rights
- Supporting the Tamil Resource Center as it struggled to rebuild its library and office after a firebombing in May 1995

Put together a community forum or town event on racism.
Give citizens a chance to talk about how racism affects your community can give you insight into how people feel on the subject, ideas on what you and others can do to combat racism, a chance to let people who share similar concerns to network with each other, and to publicly let racists know that your community will not stand for racism in its midst. See Chapter 2, Section 2: Conducting Public Forums for more details.

Make an effort to support events that celebrate the traditions of different cultural and ethnic groups.
This can be as simple as including such events on the community calendar and actively publicizing them. Your organization can also co-sponsor these events to show its support.

Organize vigils, anti-racism demonstrations, protests, or rallies.
If a racist group or incident occurred in your community, organizing a vigil, demonstration or public protest will not only give you and others some effective way to respond, but also help give hope to your community by having everyone come.

Create an intentional strategy that engages local government, business, education, media, and other leaders to demonstrate the commitment to eliminate racism in the institutions in your community.

Conducting public forums and events will increase awareness and reduce racial prejudice. Working in a coalition made up of cross-sector leaders and developing a clear plan will move your community towards a more sustainable effort to eliminate racism.

Bringing together leaders to create a strategy that deliberately, systematically, and explicitly deals with racism will enable your community to have a longer-term vision for a just and healthy community. Each institution should find a way for how it can contribute to eliminating racism in its policies and practices. The media should be involved to help get the word out. Credible leaders need to take a public stand to promote and validate the effort. Work to ensure that diversity is valued and included in the city government's mission statement

Kook Lutz Klowns counter-protest
During a Ku Klux Klan event in Pennsylvania, a group calling itself the "Kook Lutz Klowns" counter-protested by showing up at the rally dressed in flowered sheets, red noses, and wigs.

After September 11, different immigrant communities held vigils to express their sympathy for the World Trade Center and Pentagon victims and their families, speak out against anti-Muslim acts, and show their commitment and loyalty to the United States.

The Center for Healthy Communities in Dayton, Ohio hosted a community forum titled "Race, Ethnicity and Public Policy: A Community Dialogue" in the fall of 1997. This community forum gave a panel of local expert as well as members of the audience the chance to ask mayoral and city commission candidates questions about the impact of racism on the Dayton community and the role it plays in local public policy decisions . More than 150 people attended, including state and local officials, community organizers , clergy, citizens, and students.

South Orange/Maplewood Coalition on Race's long-term vision for an integrated community
The Coalition developed strategies at the individual, community, and institutional levels to foster and support an integrated neighborhood. The Coalition is planning to conduct study circles to provide residents an opportunity to build relationships. A community-wide activity was to invite Beverly Daniel Tatum to a community forum to talk about racism and how it affects our children's education. The Coalition worked with local bookstores to first sell Ms. Tatum's book at a reduced cost and to publicize the community forum. During the community forum after Ms. Tatum's presentation, small group discussions were held by facilitators that the Coalition provided. At the institutional level, there is loan program for homebuyers that is designed to encourage and improve neighborhood diversity in particular areas of the community where one race is underrepresented. They also worked closely with the school district to "reinvent" a school to become a "Lab school," which has attracted a more diverse student population to the school, and increased demand among people of different races for the neighborhood around the school.

Things You Can Do As An Individual: Fighting Racial Prejudice to Fighting Racism

You don't have to form a group to do something about racism. As an individual, there are many steps that you can take to reduce another person's prejudice, including:

- Make a commitment to speak up when you hear racial slurs or remarks that signal racial prejudice.
- Take advantage of events and other informational materials during Black History Month or Hispanic Heritage Month and make it a point to learn something new about different cultures.
- Think about ways to improve your workplace to promote racial understand and equity. Be proactive about making

suggestions.
- If you are a parent, give your child opportunities to attend events about other cultures. Integrate different traditions about parenting and children's festivals into your parent teacher association and your child's school. Work with the teachers to coordinate such opportunities.

For other things that you can do as an individual, please see Sections 2 and 5 in this chapter.

Changing people's attitudes and institutional practices is hard work, but critical to do. A commitment among individuals, organizations, and institutions to valuing diversity is essential for healthy communities. Changes will not happen overnight, but you can begin to take small steps towards making a difference, as suggested in this section. These small steps build the foundation for more organized, deeper, and larger efforts to build inclusive communities, a topic that will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

We encourage the reproduction of this material but ask that you credit the Community Tool Box.

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Additional online resources:
Anti-Racism.Net: http://www.igc.org/igc/gateway/arnindex.html
Political Research Associates: http://www.igc.org/pra/
Southern Catalyst Network: http://www.tulane.edu/~so-inst/catalyst/catalyst.htm
Southern Poverty Law Center: http://www.splcenter.org/

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Table of Contents | Links | Troubleshooting Guide | Toolkits | Best Processes & Practices

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents >
Part H. Cultural Competence, Spirituality, and the Arts a... >
Chapter 27. Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World >
Section 1. Understanding Culture and Diversity in Building C... >
Main Section - Introduction, what, why, when, who, and how. >

<<< BACK TO TOC

Understanding Culture and Diversity in Building Communities

Main Section Contributed by Marya Axner Edited by Bill Berkowitz

What is culture?

Why is understanding culture important if we are community builders?

What kind of cultural community can you envision for yourself?

Helpful Tips to Start Building a Diverse Community

What is culture?

As community builders, understanding culture is our business. Whether you live in central Kansas or New York City, whether you live in Miami, Nevada, or the Pacific Northwest, you are working with and establishing relationships with people--people who *all* have cultures.

What *is* culture? Here is one viewpoint.

"Culture" refers to a group or community which shares common experiences that shape the way its members understand the world. It includes groups that we are born into, such as race, national origin, gender, class, or religion. It can also include a group we join or become part of. For example, it is possible to acquire a new culture by moving to a new country or region, by a change in our economic status, or by becoming disabled. When we think of culture this broadly we realize we all belong to many cultures at once.

Do you agree? How might this apply to you?

Why is culture important?

Culture is a strong part of people's lives. It influences their views, their values, their humor, their hopes, their loyalties, and their worries and fears. If you are from New Mexico or Montana, if your parents are Cambodian, French Canadian, or Native American, if you are German Catholic or African-American, if you are Jewish or Mormon, if you are straight or Gay, if you are a mixture of cultures your culture has affected you. So when you are working with people and building relationships with them, it helps to have some perspective and understanding of their cultures.

But as we explore culture, it's also important to remember how much we have in common. A person who grew up in Tibet, will probably see the world very differently than someone who grew up in Manhattan--but both people know what it is like to wake up in the morning and look forward to the adventures that of the day. We are all human beings. We all love deeply, want to learn, have hopes and dreams, and have experienced pain and fear.

At the same time, we can't pretend that our cultures and differences don't matter. We can't gloss over differences and pretend they don't exist, wishing that we could be alike. And we can't pretend that people that discrimination doesn't exist.

This chapter will give you practical information about how to understand culture, establish relationships with people from cultures different from your own, act as an ally against racism and other forms of discrimination, create organizations in which diverse groups can work together, overcome internalized oppression, and build strong and diverse communities.

This section is an introduction to understanding culture, and will focus on:

- What culture is
- The importance of understanding culture in community building
- Envisioning your cultural community
- How to get started in building communities that encourage diversity.

But first, it is important to remember that everyone has an important viewpoint and role to play when is comes to culture. You don't have to be an expert to build relationships with people different from yourself; you don't have to have a degree to learn to become sensitive to cultural issues; and you don't have to be a social worker to know how culture has affected your life.

Why is understanding culture important if we are community builders?

The United States is becoming increasingly diverse. By the turn of the century one out of every three Americans will be a person of color. According to James Banks, more than 8 million legal immigrants came to the U.S. between 1981 and 1990, and an undetermined number of undocumented immigrants enter the United States each year (see **Resources**). In addition, the United States includes people of many religions, languages, economic groups, and other cultural groups.

It is becoming clear that in order to build communities that are successful at improving conditions and resolving problems, we need to understand and appreciate many cultures, establish relationships with people from cultures other than our own, and build strong alliances with different cultural groups. Additionally, we need to bring non-mainstream groups into the center of civic activity. Why?

1. In order to build communities that are powerful enough to attain significant change, we need large numbers of people working together. If cultural groups join forces, they will be more effective in reaching common goals, than if each group operates in isolation.

2. Each cultural groups has unique strengths and perspectives that the larger community can benefit from. We need a wide range of ideas, customs, and wisdom to solve problems and enrich community life. Bringing non-mainstream groups into the center of civic activity can provide fresh perspectives and shed new light on tough problems.

3. Understanding cultures will help us overcome and prevent racial and ethnic divisions. Racial and ethnic divisions result in misunderstandings, loss of opportunities, and sometimes violence. Racial and ethnic conflicts drain communities of financial and human resources; they distract cultural groups from resolving the key issues they have in common.

4. People from different cultures have to be included in decision-making processes in order for programs or policies to be effective. The people affected by a decision have to be involved in formulating solutions--it's a basic democratic principle. Without the input and support of *all* the groups involved, decision-making, implementation, and follow through are much less likely to occur.

5. An appreciation of cultural diversity goes hand-in-hand with a just and equitable society. For example, research has shown that when students' cultures are understood and appreciated by teachers, the students do better in school. Students feel more accepted, they feel part of the school community, they work harder to achieve, and they are more successful in school.

6. If we do not learn about the influences that cultural groups have had on our mainstream history and culture, we are all missing out on an accurate view of our society and our communities.

As you think about diversity, it may be helpful to envision the kind of cultural community you want to build. In order to set some goals related to building relationships between cultures, resolving differences, or building a diverse coalition, it helps to have a vision of the kind of cultural community you hope for.

What kind of cultural community do you envision?

Can you imagine the kind of cultural community you want to live or work in?

People have very different views of what a multicultural society or community should be like or could be like. In the past few decades there has been a lot of discussion about what it means to live and work together in a society that is diverse as ours. People struggle with different visions of a fair, equitable, moral, and harmonious society.

People struggle with these kinds of questions:

How will our country be unified as a cohesive whole, if people separate into many different cultural groups?

In order to be a part of the American dream, must I assimilate?

Why does racism persist in a country that is committed to equality and liberty?

How can I protect my children from the harmful influences in the larger culture? How can I instill my children with the moral values of my own religion or culture, but still expose them to a variety of views?

Are there structural problems in our government or economic system that serve to divide cultural groups? How can they be changed?

Should I put my community building and civic energies into my own cultural community, rather than the mainstream culture? Where can I have the biggest influence?

Can oppression be stopped by legislation, or does each person have to overcome their individual prejudice, or both?

Why do immigrants have to hold onto their own cultures and languages when they come to the United States?

If my group is excluded from the American dream, what can I do?

How do I protect my children from being targeted by racism or sexism other forms of discrimination if I live in a diverse society? Shall I send them to Afro-centric school, or a female-only school, or another appropriate school?

If each person overcame their own prejudices, would all the divisions disappear?

How do I overcome my prejudices?

Is prejudice a thing of the past?

Why can't we all just get along?

What do you think about these questions? Which issues do you struggle with? What other issues are important to you or your cultural group?

As you envision the kind of diverse community, you and your neighbors may want to consider these kinds of questions. These are some of the real and tough questions that people grapple with on a daily basis. These questions point to some of the tensions that arise as we try to build harmonious, active, and diverse communities in a country as a complex as ours. There are no easy answers; we are all learning as we go.

So, what kind of community do you envision for yourself? How will diversity be approached in your community? If you could have your ideal community right now what would it look like? If you can't have your ideal community right now, what will be the next steps you will take in building the kind of cultural community you want?

Here are some questions that may help you think about your community:

- Who lives in your community right now?
- What kinds of diversity already exists?
- What kinds of relationships are established between cultural groups?
- Are the different cultural groups well organized?

- What kind of struggles between cultures exist?
- What kind of struggles within cultural groups exist?
- Are these struggles openly recognized and talked about?
- Are there efforts to build alliances and coalitions between groups?
- What issues do different cultural groups have in common?

These are some of the questions that can get you thinking about your how to build the kind of community you hope for. What other issues do you think are important to consider? What are your next steps?

So, you may ask, "How do we get started?" Here are some ideas that will help you set the stage for creating your vision of a diverse organization or community.

Helpful tips to start building a diverse community

In the book, ***Healing into Action***, authors Cherie Brown and George Mazza list principles that, when put into practice, help create a favorable environment for building diverse communities. The following guidelines are taken from their principles:

- Welcome everyone. In order for people to commit to working on diversity, every person needs to feel that they will be included and important. Whether the person is a Japanese-American woman, a white man, a Jew, a gay person, an African-American, a Arab-American, a fundamentalist Christian, or speaks with an accent, has a disability, is poor, or is wealthy--each person needs to feel welcomed in the effort to create a diverse community. And each person needs to know that their culture is important to others.
- Guilt doesn't work in fostering diversity. Blaming people as a way of motivating them is not effective. Shaming people for being in a privileged position only causes people to feel bad; it doesn't empower them to take action to change. People are more likely to change when they are appreciated and liked, not condemned or guilt-tripped.
- Treating everyone the same may be unintentionally oppressive. Although every person is unique, some of us have been mistreated or oppressed because we are a member of a particular group. If we ignore these present-day or historical differences, we may fail to understand the needs of those individuals. Often people are afraid that recognizing differences will divide people from each other. However, learning about cultural differences can actually bring people closer together, because it can reveal important parts of each others? lives. It can show us how much we have in common as human beings.
- People can take on tough issues more readily when the issues are presented with a spirit of hope. We are bombarded daily with newspapers and TV reports of doom and gloom. People have a difficult time functioning at all when they feel there is no hope for change. When you present diversity issues you can say things like, "This is an excellent opportunity to build on the strengths that this organization has," or "There is no reason why we can't solve this problem together."
- Building a team around us is the most effective way of creating institutional and community change around diversity issues. You will be more effective if you have a group of people around you that works together closely. People often try to go it alone, but we can lose sight of our goals and then become discouraged when operating solo. It is important to take the time to develop strong relationships with a core of people, and then work together as a group.
- Recognize and work with the diversity already present in what appear to be homogenous groups. In working to combat racism and other forms of oppression many people become discouraged when they are unable to create a diverse group. Starting by recognizing differences in religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomics, parenting, and class backgrounds will help create a climate that welcomes differences; it will also lay the groundwork for becoming more inclusive.

To sum it up

The American dream beckons us. In the words of James Banks,

> "Our nation's motto is *e pluribus unum*--out of many, one." The changing ethnic texture of the United States intensifies the challenge of educating citizens and creating an authentic *unum* that has moral authority. An *authentic unum* reflects the experiences, hopes, and reams of all the nation's citizens. An *imposed unum*, the kind that has existed throughout most of the nation's history, reflects one dominant cultural group. Our challenge, as a new century begins, is to establish an authentic unum that has moral authority and yet create moral, civic, and just communities in which citizens from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural communities will participate and to which they will have allegiance.

In this section we've gotten started. We've talked about what diversity is, why it is important, how to begin envisioning

your ideal diverse community, and how to set up an environment that fosters diversity. This is only the beginning.

In working towards your diverse organization or community there is much more to do. In the next sections we will talk about how to become aware of your own culture, build relationships with from different cultures, become allies to people discriminated against, overcome internalized oppression, build multicultural organizations and coalitions, and other topics as well.

Each of us can build the kinds of communities we dream of. In our families, organizations, institutions, and neighborhoods, we can insist that we won't remain isolated from those who are different from ourselves. We can transform our neighborhoods, institutions, and governments into equitable, non-oppressive, and diverse communities.

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the Community Tool Box: http://ctb.ku.edu

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Organizations:

Center for Living Democracy
289 Fox Farm Rd
PO Box 8187
Brattleboro, VT 05304-8187
(802) 254-1234

National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI)
1835 K Street, N.W., Suite 715
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) 785-9400

Re-evaluation Counseling
719 Second Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109

(206) 284-0113
http://www.rc.org/

Southern Poverty Law Center
400 Washington Ave.
Montgomery, AL 36104
http://www.splcenter.org/

Study Circle Resource Center
Topsfield Foundation, Inc.
P.O Box 203
Pomfret, CT
(860) 928-2616
scrc@neca.com

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents >
Part H. Cultural Competence, Spirituality, and the Arts a... >
Chapter 27. Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World >
Section 5. Learning to be an Ally for People from Diverse Gr... >
Main Section - Introduction, what, why, when, who, and how. >

<<< BACK TO TOC

Learning to be an Ally for People from Diverse Groups and Backgrounds

Main Section Contributed by Marya Axner Edited by Bill Berkowitz

What are allies?

Why should you be an ally to people from diverse backgrounds and oppressed groups?

How do you become an ally?

"Mind your own business."

Does that phrase sound familiar? Many of us heard that phrase in our families growing up.

As community builders, there may be many times when we really need to mind our own business, but often our work requires us to be involved with other people and make their business ours. We need to get to know people, find out what they're up against, and support them in their struggles. That's a lot of what allies do--get involved and support people, instead of staying on the sidelines.

If we want to develop effective partnerships and coalitions, we need to learn how to be active allies to each other's groups. If we want people to stand up for our concerns and interests, we need to understand and stand up for theirs. If we want to make changes in society so that oppression is not acceptable, we need to learn how to work together as each other's allies.

What is an ally? *An ally is any person who supports, empowers, or stands up for another person or a group of people.*

Everybody has had the experience of *needing* an ally. When you were a young person, did you ever have an adult blame you for something you didn't do? Did you ever have so much bad luck that you needed a lot of help from others to turn your situation around? Did you ever get targeted because you were different? Whatever your life story, there are probably dozens of times, when you could have used a person or group to help you when you were in a jam or when you were unfairly blamed, targeted, or left without resources.

In this section we are going to focus on how to be allies to people from diverse backgrounds and oppressed groups.

Why? Because people from targeted or oppressed groups are systematically bombarded by society with unfair treatment, hostility, violence, or other forms of discrimination. People who are targeted need support from those people who are not targeted in the same ways.

However, before we get started, if you are a person who has not had an opportunity to explore your own cultural background, or a person who believes you don't *have* a cultural background, you may want to start with Sections 1 and 2 or this chapter (Section 1, *Understanding Culture and Diversity in Building Communities* and Section 2, *Building Relationships with People from Different Cultures*). This background information can help you get started.

Why? Because in order to be an ally to people in groups that have been targeted, it is important to understand how you have been targeted in your life or how your family has been targeted in the past. The history of your own cultural group, often generations back, can influence the way you see other groups. If you are aware of how your own heritage and history has influenced you, you will be better equipped to be an ally to others.

On the other hand, if you are a person who is already aware of your own oppression, some of the information in this section may be familiar. Unfortunately however, our first-hand experience of oppression doesn't automatically teach us how to be allies to members of other groups. In order to work in close partnerships with other groups, we all have to learn how to be effective allies to each other.

Why do we become allies to others?

There are a few important reasons. First, it is in our own self-interest to be an ally. In the long-run, each of our own struggles is tied to everyone else's. In order to live in the kind of communities we hope for, in order to build real unity, and in order to reach our goals of building strong communities, we need to understand that we are all affected when any one person or group is not getting a fair deal or is not able to live a normal decent life. Second, being an ally is simply the right to do. If we want to live in communities that have a high moral standard, we ourselves need to start the ball rolling by doing what is right.

In this chapter we will talk about:

1. What allies are
2. Why community builders should learn to be allies to people from different cultural backgrounds and oppressed groups
3. How to become an ally to people from diverse backgrounds and oppressed groups

What are allies?

There are many different ways to be an ally. Here are some examples:

- A man tells his coworkers that he's no longer interested in telling or listening to any jokes that put down women.
- An experienced manager gives a new hire from an oppressed group some tactical advice on how to work the system.
- A individual helps a person of color or a working class person to run for office, through encouragement, fund-raising, and direct campaigning.
- A college educated man works at a community center in a low-income neighborhood. He trains neighborhood people to lead community meetings, rather than leading the meetings himself.
- Parents and teachers organize a program about teasing and targeting to help teenagers who are being harassed for being gay in their high school. They also launch a program in which all students can come to small groups to talk about their feelings about sexuality, sex roles, and other related topics.
- A person stands up in a town meeting and speaks on behalf of an immigrant group that is being scapegoated for "taking jobs" from people who have lived in the community for a longer period of time.
- A couple helps a teenager by taking him into their home because the teen's family is not able to take care of him.

As you can see, there is a whole spectrum of ways to act as an ally. Sometimes, it's just reaching out and caring; sometimes it means taking a stand against ethnic, sexist, or other oppressive jokes; sometimes it is thinking about a person and encouraging them to keep trying; it can mean helping a person get a seat on an influential board, it could also mean speaking out publicly against injustice; sometimes it means backing a person's leadership; sometimes it entails organizing a demonstration against discrimination.

Whatever the circumstances, as community members, we probably have a greater capacity to be effective allies to each other than we realize. We have the ability to think about each other, empower each other, and act on each other's behalf in our day-to-day lives or in emergency situations.

And like almost anything else, being an ally is a skill. Although being an ally often comes quite naturally, you can learn how to be an ally; and the more you do it the better you get at it.

The distinct role of an ally

If you are not a member of a particular cultural group, you have a role to play that is different from the members of that group. You may be able to intervene and be effective in supporting the group in ways that the group members may not.

As an ally, you have a perspective that is different than people directly involved. Have you ever watched an accident take place? Perhaps you stood and watched while two cars crashed. You would certainly have a different perspective on what happened than the people who were in the accident. If you are an ally, you are not directly targeted by that particular oppression or set of circumstances. You can see outside of it and present a different point of view. Your point of view can be helpful to people who are targeted. You are in a distinct position to help.

Additional important points to remember about being an ally:

- You don't need to wait until someone invites you to become an ally--you can simply take the initiative. You may need to go slowly and learn as you go, but don't assume you are not wanted just because no one asked.
- Anyone can be an ally to anyone else. If you are Polish, African American, White, Jewish, Catholic, Latino, Native American, Arab, Protestant, disabled, young, old, poor, gay, etc., you are entitled to be an ally and act on behalf of

any group you choose.
- As you learn to be an ally, remember, allies make mistakes! It is part of the job description. If you are going to get involved, you are going to make mistakes. It's either that or sit on the sidelines.
- Being an ally is not only a one-way relationship. It is often reciprocal.

Why should you be an ally to people from oppressed groups?

As we said earlier, *it is in our own self-interest to be an ally to people from diverse and oppressed groups.* Ultimately, our own struggles are tied to everyone else's. Here is why:

- We live in an increasingly diverse country. In order to organize, unify, and empower communities, people need to learn how act on each other's behalf.
- When you give support to others, you are developing allies for your own groups and your own causes--in fact there is probably no better way to make an ally than to be one to someone else.
- In order to address and change the systemic problems that cause oppression, you will need a lot of people who work together cooperatively and who are not vulnerable to divide-and-conquer tactics. Strong alliances between many groups can provide the necessary people power to make systemic changes.
- When you are standing up against oppression, you are creating a moral standard in your community. You are putting people on notice that targeting any group will not be allowed.
- Groups are frequently isolated from each other: "Us" from "them" and "them " from "us." Often groups that are targeted feel that no one cares about "their" issues and they can't get help. Often non-target groups feel that their lives are not impacted by racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, etc.; they feel powerless, numb, and distant. Being an ally is an antidote to isolation for those targeted by oppression *and* those in the targeting role--it empowers *everyone* involved.
- Our communities need the voices, opinions, and help of people from many different groups. As we reach out to groups, they will be more likely to become involved in and give their energy to the bigger community.
- Last, but not least, in the process of becoming an ally, you have an opportunity to regain your humanity in a society that can often be dehumanizing.

Why shouldn't you become an ally?

Not everyone should be an ally in all situations. There are times when our motivations are not useful or can even be detrimental.

Here are some examples:

- *Don't be an ally to diverse groups as a way of avoiding your own group.* If you don't like your own group or background, you won't be effective with people in different groups. People will detect your lack of pride and will not trust you. In addition, you have to be open to understanding all groups
- Don't be an ally to alleviate feelings of guilt. Alleviating guilt is not usually a sturdy long-term motivator. Lillian Roybal Rose, expert in cross-cultural communication, said in *Impacts of Racism on White Americans*, "If you feel guilty this can eventually lead to anger, and your behavior then becomes reactive and resentful." Rose goes on to draw an analogy between a guilty ally and a parent who is compensating for not meeting her children's long-term needs for attention by bringing the children big gifts. The gifts don't take care of what the children need; they are still not happy and the parent becomes angry because the children are not grateful and appreciative.
- *Don't be an ally in order to "help" people because you are "better" than they are.* This may be obvious, but it is important. Sometimes people are motivated by the unconscious belief that oppression is the fault of the oppressed--that if members of oppressed groups were more clever, smart, or harder-working they would not have gotten themselves into this bad situation. If we think we are better than others we are merely reinforcing oppressive messages.

Okay. Now let's get down to the nuts and bolts of how to be an effective ally.

How do you become an ally?

Here are some steps you can take. They are first listed, and then elaborated upon one at a time.

1. Establish friendships with people who belong to groups that are not usually in the center of mainstream culture.
2. Learn about each other's cultures and histories.
3. Examine your own prejudices.
4. Take a stand when groups are targeted with unjust treatment.
5. Promote the leadership of people in groups that traditionally don't take leadership positions.

6. Support different groups on the issues that affect them most directly.
7. Support groups to gain power in their communities.
8. Help bring isolated or marginalized groups into the center of activity: don't leave groups isolated.
9. Work to change the system-wide problems that may be root causes of inequality and oppression.
10. Get help: train other people to be allies.
11. Develop alliances among groups.

1. Establish friendships with people who belong to groups that are not usually in the center of mainstream culture.

Establishing a friendship may not be a sensational occurrence that gets reported in newspapers, but it is probably one of the most significant things you can do as a community builder and ally. Each person needs to know they matter--friendship is one the most powerful tools we have to communicate that. One of the most damaging parts of oppression is the message given to people that they don't make a difference to other human beings. Friendship is the antidote to that message.

Also, friendship is the foundation for almost any other step in being an ally. For example, having a friendship with someone in a different cultural group can help you get a first -hand look at the problems people face in their day-to-day lives. Breaking down barriers and mistrust between groups usually occurs between two people, not just in the acts of legislation or policy-making.

So, how do you make friends with people from different cultural groups or oppressed groups? In most ways, it is the same as making friends with anyone. You spend time with people. You try to set up projects in which you can work together so that you can have day-to-day contact. You ask what people are interested in and you listen to the answers. You also open up about yourself and put your trust in the people you want to get to know.

Establishing friendships is a slow process which builds with each interaction. When you are making friends with people who have a different culture, or who have a history of oppression, it is important to be more sensitive, more patient, and make more of an effort. When people have been mistreated by society as a whole or by your group in particular, trust will take more time to establish. That is okay; you can't expect that people will trust you right away.

Also, if people tell you about their disappointments about you or other people in your group, try not to be defensive. It may be a sign that you have earned enough trust for people to be honest with you about the way they see things. You want people to be real with you.

2. Learn about each other's cultures and histories.

If you want to be useful to people of a cultural group, you should learn something about that group--it's history, religious beliefs, its strengths, or how its people have been oppressed. For example, if you want to be an ally to Japanese-Americans, then reading some of books about the U.S. Internment Camps during World War II would be one piece of your self-education plan.

Or, if you want to be an ally to elders, you might ask them what it's like to grow older. How are older people are treated in society? Are they taken seriously? Are they left out of celebrations? And what is it like to have to contend with health care cuts?

3. Examine your own prejudices.

In order to be effective allies to people that are different from ourselves, we have to face our own prejudices. Otherwise, unintentionally, we can act in ways that are not as helpful as we would like. We have to become aware of the ways that we unintentionally may be racist, anti -Semitic, sexist, homophobic, etc.

We *all* carry misinformation and stereotypes about people. Especially, when we are young, we acquire this misinformation in bits and pieces from TV, from listening to people talk, from watching the expressions on our parents' faces, and from the culture at large. We also witness people being treated badly because they are people of color or are poor, etc. All these experiences are confusing to young children; they are hurtful experiences that make us feel bad about ourselves and make us feel distant from both those who are targeted *and* those who are acting out the prejudiced behavior. These experiences, like any hurtful experience, get locked away inside us, but don't disappear. They provide us with a foundation of misunderstanding and fear upon which our prejudices are built.

We are not bad people because we acquired prejudices; no one requested to be misinformed or confused. But once you have them, what how can you undo these prejudices?

You *can* heal from them. Below are two different methods for overcoming your prejudice:

- Re-evaluation Counseling model:

Reevaluation Counseling, an organization that promotes peer counseling, uses a model of healing from prejudices in which people take turns listening to each other. The theory of Reevaluation Counseling states that people are good and no one would develop prejudices unless they, themselves, had been hurt.

In this model, people establish a listening partnership or support group with others who have similar cultural backgrounds. In these groups or pairs, people take turns talking about how they acquired prejudices when they were young, while others listen without judgment.

People often start out by focusing on *their* experiences being targeted and hurt by others. As each person remembers their own battles with oppression, they are more equipped to face the ways in which other people have been targeted.

When people are ready, they tell about their experiences in acquiring prejudices, or in colluding with discriminatory practices. Surrounded by others who are also taking risks, people are able to overcome their defensiveness. As people tell their stories, they often feel their emotions. People sometimes cry, laugh, or tremble, as they thaw out the parts of themselves that have been frozen in unaware prejudice.

> Example:
>
> In a group, a man--we'll call him Steve--talked about how he became vulnerable to prejudiced attitudes. As a boy, Steve was consistently targeted for being shorter than other boys. At school no one intervened to help him. He came to expect that the adults would not stand up for him when he was teased or beat up.
>
> He was told to "toughen up." Having to deal with these problems on his own, he began to expect that everyone would have to learn to take care of their problems by themselves. So when Steve's African-American or Jewish or Polish friends got targeted, he did not expect grown-ups to help with the situation. Nor did he feel that *he* could do anything to help the situation.
>
> After meeting in a support group for awhile, Steve remembered what it had been like to be targeted for being short. He also remembered that early on, he had had friendships with people from many different cultural groups. Eventually, Steve talked and cried about being left on his own to struggle against cruelty directed at him and others.
>
> He began to understand that he had gotten in the habit of distancing himself from others who needed help, and he grieved the loss of his earlier friendships with children of different races and cultures. He made a decision to not let his old experiences hold him back from making friends with people different from himself.
>
> *Taken from the author's experiences as a group leader.*

(For more information about Re-evaluation Counseling see **Resources** at the end of this section.)

Lillian Roybal Rose, cross-cultural expert, says, in reference to healing from racism,

> "...if White people only confront these issues on a cognitive basis, they will wind up as hostages of political correctness. They will be careful about what they say, but their actions will be rigid and self-conscious. When the process is emotional, as well as cognitive, the state of being an ally becomes a process of gaining one's own humanity. Then there is no fear, because there is no image to tear down, no posture to correct. The movement to a global ethnic point of view requires tremendous grieving. I encourage white people to not shrink from the emotional content of this process," (see **Resources**).

What Lillian Roybal Rose says about how White people need to grieve about racism, can also apply to men needing to grieve about sexism, gentiles needing to grieve about anti -Semitism, wealthy or middle-class people needing to grieve about classism, and any other group that needs to overcome their unaware prejudices.

- Study Circles model:

Study circles are small-group, democratic, peer-led discussions that provide a simple way to involve community members in genuine dialogue about issues such as race, immigration, and

cultural differences. In these discussions people from different backgrounds talk openly about their experiences related to cultural differences, race, immigration, violence and other issues that divide people. Oftentimes in these discussions, people become more aware of their prejudices by listening to the experiences of others and by having a chance to talk about their own experiences and beliefs.

Study circles can take place within organizations such as schools, unions, or government agencies. They have also been used very successfully as large-scale community-wide programs in which sometimes thousands of people address these issues.

The Study Circle Resource Center provides written discussion guides on different topics as well as guides for organizing community-wide study circle programs. (See Chapter 31, Section 11: *Organizing Study Circles* for more information.)

4. Take a stand when groups are targeted with unjust treatment.

Perhaps the most important way to be an ally is to act, speak out, or take a stand when a individual or group is being targeted.

There are a variety of methods and avenues which people use to take action when injustice is being aimed at a group. The one you choose will depend on the situation. It could be an ad in the paper, a boycott, a demonstration, or using behind-the-scenes negotiations to change the situation.

Here is an example of a whole community that took a stand against oppression:

In Billings Montana, in December, 1993, a series of hate crimes occurred. Someone broke the windows of Jewish families who had menorahs in their windows. The town organized and distributed paper menorahs. All around town people put menorahs in their windows, taking a stand against anti-Semitism.

Example taken from Teaching Tolerance. See **Resources.**

Taking a stand or speaking out against injustice usually requires courage, but it is the bottom line when it comes to being an ally.

5. Promote the leadership of people in groups that traditionally don't take leadership positions.

You can be an ally by promoting people into leadership roles. This empowers people, so they can take charge of lives, instead of being dependent on help from others. In particular, you can make leadership opportunities more available to immigrants, women, people of color, low-income people, people with disabilities, young people, and others.

You can promote leaders by providing informal or formal leadership training, mentoring them, (See Chapter 13: *Orienting Ideas in Leadership*), by inviting individuals to take leadership roles, or by supporting them in elections for local offices.

Example:

The organization "Youth on Board" in Somerville, Massachusetts, trains and supports young people to be involved in decision-making that affects their lives. For example, people in Youth on Board:

- Have helped establish city commissions for young people (run by youth)
- Support young people to serve on boards of non-profits and school committees
- Encourage foundations to create committees of young people who help make funding decisions
- Have provided coaching to a group of young people to negotiate with architects who were designing their high school

In general, they help young people have a voice in any decision that affects their lives.

In the example above, an entire organization's goal is to empower young people to lead. However, as individuals, we can also act on a one-to-one basis to support people to lead.

Once you have successfully promoted someone into a leadership position, they will need you as much as ever. Everyone needs support when they are in a leadership role, especially people who don't have a lot of experience. For example, you may need to listen to a leader as she thinks through the challenges she confronts. Or you may need to work with group members to teach them how to support their leader, or overcome any prejudices they may have about her.

6. Support different groups on the issues that affect them most directly.

This one is rather obvious--help people where they need help. If you ask a few questions or pay attention for a short time you can usually figure out what the key issues are for any group and then you can decide to offer assistance. A group may need short-term emergency aid, information about drug prevention, economic development consulting, or other kinds of help.

Example:

In the Uptown neighborhood in Chicago, where economic development is a key issue, a few non-profit organizations worked together to help Vietnamese immigrants become entrepreneurs. The Uptown Center Hull House and St. Augustine College with the Vietnamese Association of Illinois set up bilingual programs to teach Vietnamese immigrants skills in bookkeeping, marketing, licensing, customer relations, how to get a bank loan, and how to set up a business plan. The results have been highly successful. For example, Hero Phan went through the program and started Saigon Auto Repair which attracts customers from the Northside of Chicago and some suburbs. He started with plenty of experience as an auto mechanic, but had no experience operating a business in the U.S. The program to support entrepreneurs provided Phan with the skills he needed to make a go of it.

*Example comes from Doing Democracy. (See **Resources**).*

7. Support groups to gain power in their communities.

One of the most effective ways of being an ally is lending your financial, technical, or human resources to help groups gain long-term power in their communities. This may mean consulting with groups to help them write grants which will enable them to be independent, it may mean supporting a cultural group to gain more power in local politics, or in may mean helping people gain more control over their housing.

Example:

In Minneapolis, a Hmong and African-American neighborhood was displaced by a city-sponsored market-value housing and business development. The families were given some compensation, but were relocated throughout Minneapolis, thus dispersing their cultural communities. A Minneapolis group is organizing to support the Hmong and African -American families to help them obtain the right to buy or rent housing in their redeveloped neighborhood.

Taken from an interview with Arthur Himmelman

8. Help bring isolated or marginalized groups into the center of activity: don't leave groups isolated.

Every group should have contact with the larger community. When groups become isolated, they often need help. For example, young people who belong to gangs need help to become engaged in the mainstream community, so they don't get involved with drugs, violence, or other crimes. Also, sometimes new immigrant groups need to be welcomed and encouraged to interact and become involved in the larger community. Immigrants may need ESL classes, employment counseling, or relationships with people outside their group.

As allies we need to bring people and groups into the middle of things. Here is an example of helping a group with a disability become less isolated:

At Kinzie school in Chicago, a group of teachers and parents worked over a period of years to integrate a group of deaf students into mainstream classes with hearing students. The school started out with two entirely segregated programs. Slowly teachers started bringing the children together. Together, hearing and deaf students learned dance, studied drama, did mural painting, and participated in sports. Then, the hearing students began to learn how to sign. Eventually, the classrooms became fully integrated.

*Taken from Teaching Tolerance. See **Resources.***

9. Work to change the system-wide problems that may be root causes of inequality and oppression.

People often direct their anger at groups different from themselves, rather than confront the inequalities in our government, economic, and other social systems which often cause much of their anger. It is easier to be angry at groups of people's scapegoating them--than it is to fix a system that doesn't work. Anger is a great motivator for action, but it's important that our anger and our actions are directed at the real causes of

problems, which often lie outside of the target groups. Using the "But Why?" technique can help allies get to the root causes of what's going on. See Chapter 17, Section 4: *Analyzing the Root Causes of Problems: The "But Why?" Technique* for help in doing so.

How can an ally make a difference? You can start by looking carefully at how institutions and organizations affect those who are the disempowered, or who may be different from you. Your first step might be to vote for politicians, laws, ordinances, or policies that create conditions that promote tolerance, empower the disadvantaged, and enhance interaction among diverse groups.

Let's look at a couple of examples. Why are poor people poor? Is it because they are lazy? Or is one reason because they can't get the training that will help them obtain better employment? If that's the case, why is training not more accessible to them? Or if minority businesspeople can't afford to open a retail store in their neighborhood, is it because they don't know how to run a business, or is it because they can't get a business loan?

In both cases, some of the members of the disenfranchised group may be advocating for systems change themselves. Helpful changes might make it easier for a low-income person who lacks transportation to get a ride to appropriate training, or the changes might focus on a bank's lending practices. Whatever the change might be, it will be in those institutions and organizations that have a lot of influence and power over the target group, but which the target group has little influence with. And this is where allies often are able to step in, and use their power where it will do the most good, striking at the root causes of problems.

10. Get help: train other people to be allies.

As an individual you can accomplish a lot as an ally, but there are some bigger goals you can't accomplish by yourself. You can be much more effective if you work in a group with others. For example, you can organize a group that is committed to thinking about race issues and working to end racism. In such a group you can support each other to become effective allies and set goals to work together to handle racism in your community and make the community more aware of race issues.

11. Develop alliances among groups.

Being an ally is not usually a one-way relationship. It is more often reciprocal and can involve more groups than two. Partnerships and coalitions between Blacks and Jews, laborers and people on welfare, youth and elders, Latinos and Asians, and many more will make our communities stronger. Being an ally is an empowering role.

As you become an ally to an individual or group, invite them to become an ally to you or your group. As you do so, you will probably need to teach people how to be effective allies for you. Don't blame people if they don't already know how, or if they make mistakes--blaming people often scares them away. Learning to be an ally takes time.

To sum it up

As we all learn how to be more committed and caring to each other, we will build a strong foundation for change in our communities. The stronger the trust and commitment people have, as individuals and between groups, the more effective they will be in uniting around important issues.

James Banks, a multicultural educator, says that living in a diverse society requires that we "know, care, and act." In other words, we need to learn about people and understand their issues, care about people with our hearts, and take the action necessary to make sure that people are treated well and that justice is done. That is, basically, what an ally does.

We all have the capacity to care deeply about each other. We all have the capacity to learn and take action. Why wait for someone else to invite you or give you permission to take the initiative? You can make a difference to people throughout your community. You can be an ally to anyone at any time, as an individual, or as a member of an organization. It will make a big difference, in the short and long run.

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the Community Tool Box: http://ctb.ku.edu

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Organizations:

Center for Living Democracy
289 Fox Farm Rd
PO Box 8187
Brattleboro, VT 05304-8187
(802) 254-1234

National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI)
1835 K Street, N.W., Suite 715
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) 785-9400

Re-evaluation Counseling
719 Second Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109
(206) 284-0113
http://www.RC.ORG/

Southern Poverty Law Center
400 Washington Ave.
Montgomery, AL 36104
http://www.splcenter.org/

Study Circle Resource Center

Topsfield Foundation, Inc.
P.O Box 203
Pomfret, CT
(860) 928-2616
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Table of Contents | Links | Troubleshooting Guide | Toolkits | Best Processes & Practices

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents >
Part H. Cultural Competence, Spirituality, and the Arts a... >
Chapter 27. Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World >
Section 8. Multicultural Collaboration >
Main Section - Introduction, what, why, when, who, and how. >

<<< BACK TO TOC

Multicultural Collaboration

Main Section Contributed by Tim Brownlee Edited by Jerry Schultz and Phil Rabinowitz

What is "multicultural collaboration"?

Why is multicultural collaboration important?

When should you commit to multicultural collaboration?

What are some guidelines for multicultural collaboration?

How do you build a multicultural collaboration?

As our society becomes more culturally diverse, organizations are understanding the need to work with other organizations in order to "turn up the sound" -- so their voices are heard and their issues will be addressed. This means that individuals and institutions can no longer deny the sometimes uncomfortable realities of cultural diversity. Organizers and activists are realizing that we have to come to grips with our multicultural society, or we won't get anything done. But how do we do that?

One Wisconsin labor activist says, "We want to include communities of color, but we just don't know where to begin. We hold open meetings, but no people of color every show up."

A neighborhood organization member in South Los Angeles, says, "Last year, we decided to move toward organizing in the Latino community for the simple reason that we have a lot of new immigrants from Central America in the neighborhoods. We wanted to make an authentic multicultural organization, but we learned an important lesson -- it doesn't just happen."

Many organizers have begun to come to grips with diversity issues, even though they may not have all the answers. These organizers realized they had to develop new strategies and tactics to attract multicultural interest in their collaborative initiatives. They also knew there would be problems to solve if their collaborations were to be effective. This section will discuss how to help organizations with people of different cultures collaborate effectively.

What is "multicultural collaboration?"

First of all -- what's the difference between a *coalition*, a *collaboration*, and a *multicultural collaboration*?

A *coalition* involves two or more organizations working together around an issue or a common set of interrelated issues that they can't address on their own. The purpose is to harness enough influence and resources to have an impact on an

issue beyond the grasp that one group alone can have. The life of a coalition is usually shorter than the life of the complex issue or issues it faces; when the issue or issues are resolved the coalition disbands and the organizations go their separate ways. Coalition members understand that there will be shared risks, responsibilities, and rewards. The level of commitment is moderate. Diversity in a coalition is a strength as well as a problem because there is often dissension.

A *collaboration* involves two or more organizations working together on multiple issues and goals in a long-term commitment. This is the highest and most difficult level of working with others involving formalized organizational relationships. There is a long-term commitment and a focus on a wide variety of issues of wide concern. Turf protection can be high and the ability to let go of control over the direction of the group is critical. Involved organizations share resources (develop, implement, and evaluate programs), establish policy, and jointly conduct educational programs. The core values of collaboration are mutual respect, a valuing of difference, and a high level of trust.

A *multicultural collaboration* is between two or more groups or organizations, each comprised of members from different cultural backgrounds and orientations (e.g., Latino, American Indian, white) or with goals or missions oriented to populations with differing cultures (e.g., African-American, Asian-American). The cultural differences among groups may consist of ethnic heritage, values, traditions, languages, history, sense of self, and racial attitudes. Any of these cultural features can become barriers to working together. Unless they become part of the relationship, the collaboration will probably be challenged.

Culture is one of the most powerful forces in our world. It's central to what we see, how we make sense of it, and how we express ourselves. As people from different cultural groups work together, values sometimes conflict. When we don't understand each other we sometimes react in ways that make a partnership ineffective. Often we're not aware that cultural differences are the root of miscommunication.

See Tool 1: *Six Fundamental Patterns of Cultural Differences* and Tool 2: *An Exercise: Exploring Myths and Stereotypes.*

In an effective multicultural collaboration, the participants must have a sense of common purpose as with any collaboration, but they must consider that different cultural groups may have differing ideas about how leaders are chosen, leadership power, and how conflict and disagreement should be managed. For example, someone from an American Indian tribe may believe that a leader can be respected only if they are an elder, while this may not be an important factor to someone in another group.

A multicultural collaboration requires a plan, lots of patience, and determination to confront old attitudes in new ways by pulling in partners usually not involved. In order for a multicultural collaboration to be effective, the groups involved must overcome differences to promote a unified effort. Because of different skill levels and expertise, the "table" that everyone comes to may seem uneven at first. And, initially, participants may come for different reasons. For example, some may have been invited to absorb responsibilities others don't want -- or others may want a handy scapegoat for when things don't work. But if the focus is on the common goal, shared decision making, defined roles, and setting time lines -- the organizations involved can make it work!

See also Chapter 27, Section 7: *Building Culturally Competent Organizations* and Chapter 24, Section 4: *Developing Multisector Collaborations.*

Why is multicultural collaboration important?

- *It gets everyone to the table.*
  Because most groups have some community-wide concerns, it's essential to get them to the same table, uneven or not. According to John Gardner, the biggest problem of having many groups in society is the war of the parts against the whole. Separately they don't have the power to resolve a problem, but because they are all tied together, one part can hold up the others for ransom -- everything can be frozen if one group's efforts are focused on thwarting another's.

- *It emphasizes common interests, rather than differences.*
  Though it's odd and self-destructive, in-fighting has increased dramatically in recent years. Becoming more aware of our similarities, along with cultural differences, doesn't have to paralyze or divide us. Through common interests we can learn to translate "different from me" and "less than me" into "like me in lots of important ways." As a result "difference" becomes less of a barrier to effectiveness.

- *It makes for more effective communication among groups.*
  Understanding how people communicate is the first step toward understanding and respecting each other.

- *It enriches everyone's life when we have knowledge of others' cultures.*
  Different communication styles reflect philosophies and worldviews that are the foundations of cultures. New

understanding gives us a broader view of our world and the opportunity to see a mirror image of ourselves.

- *It takes advantage of the strength of numbers to accomplish things.*
  History shows that when groups are organized through common purpose they can wield great power and succeed. Because no one group is responsible for a problem -- no one group alone can solve it. Competition among groups doesn't aid survival in today's turbulent world.

- *It creates community.*
  As our population becomes more culturally diverse, some cultural groups, especially people of color, are experiencing more problems. If we learn to understand and value other cultures and look at each as neighbors with similar interests rather than adversaries, we will be more vested in the idea of taking better care of each other. Caring about our neighbors builds the sense of community and unites us in solving community-wide problems.

- *It leads to a more just society.*
  Multicultural collaboration can build collective capacity to help make things better -- and the consensus that it's important to do so. This offers a good chance at solving complex problems in an atmosphere of trust, cooperation, and mutual respect.

When should you commit to multicultural collaboration?

One community activist, Vicente, suggests a way to think about collaborating with people from different cultures: "To me what's important is where do we make connections? Where do our pasts tie in? We all come from agrarian backgrounds at some point in our past that are very rich with folklore, history, oral history, and values."

Another man, Estevan, says, "If I see that you're hurting, that there's something wrong with you, and I can help you out -- why do I have to care about what color of skin you have, what color of eyes you have, or where you come from? In New Mexico we say, 'Mi casa es tu casa.' My house is your house."

The comments above indicate that the human connection can be reason enough to work at overcoming cultural barriers. Following are other significant indicators of when you should commit to multicultural collaboration:

- Those most affected by the problem are not participating in a solution. This could mean that one group (possibly the group in power) needs to commit to improving its cultural understanding and appreciation -- its cultural competence -- with regard to other groups, in order for those groups to feel welcome.

- There is more at stake than individual organizations, but competing organizations are at each other's throats and are coming to unilateral decisions that hurt themselves and others.

- There are problems among many diverse groups that one organization can't solve alone or in a short period of time.

- There are several groups willing to make a long-term commitment to work for a change in thinking and to establish a common language and effective communication.

- Several organizations recognize a bad situation that could get worse if nothing is done.

- There is a desire to identify others involved in the problem and bring them to the table. Everyone at the table will share a vision and be committed to the process of reaching out to new partners, explaining the rationale, and continuing to recruit group members.

- All parties involved are clear about what they are getting into, see the tasks as meaningful work that will make a difference, and are strong stakeholder groups in the community.

- The groups represent every cultural group involved in the problem, are well organized, and are able to speak and act credibly for the groups they represent.

- The leadership of the process is committed to keeping the focus on the goals, keeping stakeholders at the table through periods of frustration and disagreement, acknowledging small successes along the way, and enforcing the group's agreed-upon rules.

It's important not to go blindly into a collaboration. Organizations should be aware of the potential problems and to realize that all collaborations may not be voluntary. Circumstances may place organizations in partnerships they may not have anticipated. For example, competition for increasingly limited funds, federal or state mandates for the establishment of

initiatives, and social crises may create non-voluntary collaborations. Forces such as these may turn a step-by-step process of recognition, initiation, structuring, and definition into one giant leap. A giant leap without forethought can lead to a painful fall.

Finally, organizations thinking about collaborating must ask themselves -- given the potential problems, should they collaborate at all? Is it an impossible goal? On the other hand, the problems shouldn't scare anyone off if there's potential for it to work with special effort. There won't be unanimous agreement on everything -- that's OK because healthy disagreement is healthy and desirable. But there may be lots of ways to work together and experience the many rewards gained through building the relationships needed to do the work.

What are some guidelines for multicultural collaboration?

Cultural questions about who we are and how we identify ourselves are at the heart of multicultural collaboration. Consider these guidelines as you confront the communication barriers:

- *Learn from generalizations about other cultures and races, but don't use those generalizations to stereotype, write off, or oversimplify your ideas about another person.* The best use of a generalization is to add it to your storehouse of knowledge so that you better understand and appreciate other interesting, multi-faceted human beings.

- *Practice, practice, practice.* That's the first rule because it's in the doing that we actually get better at cross-cultural communication.

- *Don't assume that there is one right way (yours!) to communicate.* Keep questioning your assumptions about the "right way" to communicate. For example, think about your body language; postures that indicate receptivity in one culture might indicate aggressiveness in another.

- *Don't assume that breakdowns in communication occur because other people are on the wrong track.* Search for ways to make the communication work, rather than searching for whom should receive the blame for the breakdown.

- *Listen actively and empathetically.* Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Especially when another person's perceptions or ideas are very different from your own, you might need to operate at the edge of your own comfort zone.

- *Respect others' choices about whether or not to engage in communication with you.* Honor their opinions about what is going on.

- *Stop, suspend judgment, and try to look at the situation as an outsider.* For example, when you notice blocks or difficulties in working with people, revisit your own beliefs or behaviors that may be holding you back. Also, think about how others view your work relationship and decide on ways you might change your behavior to make them more comfortable. For example, you might be speaking or dressing in a very formal manner; being more informal in dress and behavior might improve the situation.

- *Be prepared for a discussion of the past.* Use this as an opportunity to develop an understanding from "the other's" point of view, rather than getting defensive or impatient. Acknowledge historical events that have taken place. Be open to learning more about them. Honest acknowledgment of the mistreatment and oppression that have taken place on the basis of cultural difference is vital for effective communication.

- *Be aware of current power imbalances.* And be open to hearing each other's perceptions of those imbalances; it's necessary to understand each other and work together.

- *Remember that cultural norms may not apply to the behavior of any particular individual.* We are all shaped by many factors -- our ethnic background, our family, our education, our personalities -- and are more complicated than any cultural norm could suggest. Check your interpretations if you are uncertain what is meant.

- *To journey with fellow travelers we must prepare ourselves for customs and values that differ from ours.* We must understand that we each have customs that may seem foreign to others. For example, in the United States, Midwesterners tend to call colleagues by their first name as a sign of friendliness. Yet in many African-American communities, respect is shown by using last names and titles. People on the East Coast arch their eyebrows at the suggestion of a seven-thirty breakfast meeting -- nine is the preferred starting time. In the Midwest, however, early meetings are common. Native Americans often begin their meetings by sharing food before business gets started -- they are building relationships. To others, eating before working seems unproductive.

Adapted from: online AMPU Guide and Collaboration Handbook.

See Tool #3: *Collaboration Checklist.*

How do you build a multicultural collaboration?

There are three steps to developing any collaboration (1. define the setting of the problem, 2. set a direction, and 3. implement your plan). Multicultural collaboration requires considerations that may not be involved in other collaborations.

There are 6 components in building a multicultural collaboration:

1. Formulate and state clearly the vision and mission of the collaboration, modeling the multicultural relationships.

Some ways to do that:

- Make a commitment to create an organizational culture that embraces and grows from diversity. Assemble a multicultural team; a group may not appear to be serious about being multicultural when all staff members are from one group. This helps get across the message that you really mean it when your collaborative says it is committed to involving every group in all phases of the initiative -- it builds trust.
- Become aware of what dimensions of cultural diversity exist in your coalition.
- Respect and celebrate the various ethnic, racial, cultural, gender, and other differences in your group. Make the time and create the space for this to occur.
- Cultivate a multicultural atmosphere. Incorporate language, art, music, rituals, and ways of working together that derive from diverse cultures. Have appropriate resources and educational materials available, and encourage people to use them.

2. *Conduct strategic outreach and membership development.*

Some ways to do that:

- If possible, include diverse groups at the inception, rather than later. This can ensure that your collaboration's development reflects many perspectives from the very beginning. It can also minimize real or perceived tokenism (e.g., bringing one person of color into a largely white organization and giving them a title with no authority or responsibility, setting them up to look ineffectual and bad), paternalism, and inequality among the people who join later.
- Consciously give priority to increasing diversity. Consider all the different dimensions of diversity when identifying, selecting, and recruiting prospective collaborative members. Set ground rules that maintain a safe and nurturing atmosphere. Plan to invest significantly more up-front time in outreach and follow-up to build trust.
- Tap into networks (yours and others'), and use word-of-mouth and personal references to enhance your credibility. Personal contact is important. Ask if you can go to meetings of existing groups -- faith groups, civic associations, coalitions, wherever people meet. Get on their agenda for a few minutes, and make a personal invitation. Then follow up formal invitations with personal phone calls.
- Recognize that changing the appearance of your membership -- seeing variety -- is only the first step toward attaining an understanding of and respect for people of other cultures.
- Welcome and highlight different sorts of contributions, special skills, and experiences.
- Provide incentives and trade-offs to recruit diverse participants. Be prepared to operate in new ways, to share control, and build trust. Make an ongoing commitment of collaborative resources to issues of importance to the diverse group members.
- Respect the right of member organizations to maintain their own separatism if they wish. Given their own political perspective or stage of organizational development, they may prefer to work strictly on their own, rather than to join a multicultural collaboration. Try to initiate a relationship that might lead to a stronger alliance in the future.
- Develop and use ground rules for your collaborative that establish shared norms, reinforce constructive and respectful conduct, and protect against damaging behavior. See Tool 4: *Sample Ground Rules for Multicultural Collaborations.*
- Encourage or help people to develop qualities such as patience, empathy, trust, tolerance, and being nonjudgmental.

Example: *A Los Angeles neighborhood collaborative organization did this to aid communication and attract new members:* Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development Alternatives (AGENDA) generally focused on the African-American community in its work. Its staff and organizers were mostly African-American. The group wanted to attract Latinos to the collaborative initiative, but when they brought monolingual Spanish-speaking members to the general membership and committee meetings it didn't get them involved. But when a separate organization (Latino Organizing Committee) was formed it brought in 90 new members. At the same time AGENDA began conducting separate educational sessions

for African-American members to talk about how all low-income communities of color face similar challenges and problems.

The members of all of the groups came together for general membership meetings and selected planning meetings. An interpreter sitting in one part of the room with Spanish-speaking members provided translation. AGENDA also planned to add diversity training to its programs. The separate initiation groups enabled the members to get past initial resentment and see the larger interest in uniting people of color, with the long-range plan of merging the groups after recruiting and educating more members about the initiative.

3. *Establish a structure and operating procedures that reinforce equity.*

Some ways to do that:

- Create a decision making structure in which all cultural groups and genders have a recognized voice, and regularly participate in high-level decision making.
- Make sure that staff and board reflect and represent the community in which you operate. Invite input from a representative group of participants, if not all of them, into the design of any event. Use their input in noticeable ways, so that they can see their "fingerprints" on it.
- Find ways to involve everyone. Use different kinds of meetings, committees, and dialogue by phone, mail, or e-mail as means of including everyone in as active a role, or as informed a position as they want. Give people multiple opportunities to participate.
- Make sure that your commitment to multiculturalism translates into the public image of the coalition. When running meetings or presentations, be sure the presenters represent diverse groups -- not just as tokens but as substantial participants and leaders.
- Structure equal time for different groups to speak at meetings.
- Develop operational policies and programs that confront and challenge racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.
- Conduct criticism/self-criticism of meetings that articulates and builds a common set of expectations, values, and operating methods for coalition functioning.

4. *Practice new and various modes of communication and special support.*

Some ways to do that:

- Find out if anyone needs special support to participate effectively. In any invitations to meetings or events (which could be written in more than one language) or follow -up conversations, ask if there is a need for translators, translated materials, sign language interpreters for the deaf, large-print materials, or audio versions of materials. Many groups automatically communicate through writing and speaking in English. This does not take into account language differences that make it hard for people to understand information or participate equally in discussions and decision making. Special efforts to communicate in multiple languages may be required in order to ensure the full participation of a diverse membership.

  Example: *A Providence, Rhode Island community group used this as an icebreaker:* Group members were split into small groups. Latino members might be paired with English speakers, with each required learning a phrase in the other's language. At first there was frustration on the part of African-American members at not being able to communicate directly, but this subsided gradually as feelings of mutual support and community grew.

- Use inclusive and valuing language, quote diverse sources, and readily adapt to differences in communication styles.
- Learn and apply the cultural etiquette of your members.
- Avoid false praise or other forms of insincere communication.
- Learn to read different nonverbal behaviors, and interpret them as part of the dialogue.
- Make sure that everyone understands words and references that are used. Do not assume common understanding and knowledge of unwritten rules of culture. Spell things out and answer questions so that everyone is up to speed.
- Prohibit disrespectful name-calling and use of stereotypes; respect and use personal names.
- Use humor appropriately and carefully -- don't laugh at each other, but with each other. If someone makes an insulting joke or comment, the person it was addressed to should say it was hurtful; this alerts the group to their discomfort an signals that the joke was not funny. Never let this slide by. At a minimum, take the joker aside and alert them to the hurt feelings.
- Bridge language barriers in various ways. See Tool #5: *How to Bridge Language Barriers.*

5. *Create leadership opportunities for everyone, especially people of color and women.*

Some ways to do that:

- Develop a variety of leadership positions and a mechanism for leaders to work together, such as a steering

committee composed of different committee chairpersons. This enables many people to function as leaders and also encourages an interchange of leadership styles.
- Include different types of people in leadership positions so that your collaborative organization can legitimately articulate a multicultural vision and values.
- Help to cultivate leadership capacity for others, particularly people of color and women. Help people to gain competence in new areas. Build opportunities into the organizational structure for shared tasks, mentoring, and pairing up leaders with inexperienced people so that skills are transferred and confidence is increased.

6. *Engage in activities that are culturally sensitive or that directly fight oppression.*

Some ways to do that:

- Integrate aspects of different cultures into all your activities, rather than holding isolated "multinational dinners," for example. Virtually all activities lend themselves to a multicultural approach: social events, sports, street fairs, talent shows, campaigns, neighborhood improvement projects, demonstrations, and lobbying efforts.
- Hold events in mutually acceptable locations. Organizers should go to the community to hold events, rather than expecting the community to come to them. Some locations will implicitly reinforce power disparities. For example, if a meeting focuses on policy/community tensions, you would not want to hold it at the police station. Attend to access issues for those with disabilities. Often an informal environment will help people relax and get to know one another more easily.
- Consciously develop projects that people from different cultural backgrounds can work on together. Create mixed teams or small groups so that people gain more experience in working together.
- Sanction the periodic use of monocultural caucuses or teams as a way of valuing the need for each group to solidify its position and fortify its own approach to working with the larger group.
- Conduct special activities to educate everyone about different cultural concerns (e.g., forums, conferences, panels, organized dialogues).
- If your activities are not attracting or involving a diverse crowd, try running special events that are geared specifically to different groups. Such events need to be led and organized by representatives of these groups. Let your collaborative organization or community population determine the issues and events that they feel are important. Don't presume that you know what is best.
- Take responsibility for making sure that your group activities and programs address multicultural concerns. Begin with a needs assessment and review of your collaborative's track record on cultural sensitivity. Examine any racial incidents, insults, harassment, or violence that have plagued the organization or community you work in. Remember if and how the organization responded. Identify strategies or programmatic changes that would strengthen the multicultural capacity and enhance its response to incidents of oppression. (See Chapter 27, Section 7: *Building Culturally Competent Organizations.*)
- Conduct prejudice reduction work such as diversity training or multicultural awareness training to change assumptions and attitudes among your membership or community. Using skilled facilitators/trainers, such training can help your collaborative organization appreciate differences and understand how to reduce insensitive behavior.
- Network and collaborate with other groups committed to multiculturalism, or those fighting oppression or in other ways promoting social justice.

Building a multicultural collaboration entails changing the way people think, perceive, and communicate. There is a difference between recognizing cultural differences and consciously incorporating inclusive and anti-discriminatory work in all aspects of the organization. Embracing cultural differences is not something separate from the issue-oriented work. It is at the core of the group's perspective on issues, possible solutions, and membership and operating procedures. The organization's structure, leadership, and activities must reflect multiple perspectives, styles, and priorities. Changing how the organization looks and acts is just the first step in the ongoing process of creating a reality that maximizes and celebrates diversity.

To sum it up

Collaboration is a process involving organizations working toward a goal they can't reach alone. The process requires long-term commitment and an understanding that there will be shared risks, responsibilities, and rewards. Successful collaboration must be based on mutual respect, a valuing of difference, trust, a plan, lots of patience, determination to adapt old attitudes and pull in partners not usually involved, and, most of all -- a sense of common purpose.

Multicultural collaboration adds the challenge of overcoming the communication barriers of different cultures, ethnic heritage, values, traditions, language, history, sense of self, and racial attitudes. These barriers must be conquered in order for the collaboration to succeed. Participants in an effective multicultural collaboration must have inclusive leadership that understands and strives for diversity, while dealing with problems and conflict along the way. If the focus remains on the common goal and equal power for everyone involved -- chances for success are good.

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the Community Tool Box: http://ctb.ku.edu

Resources

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Support Center for Nonprofit Management/National Minority AIDS Council
Available: http://www.nmac.org

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Table of Contents | Links | Troubleshooting Guide | Toolkits | Best Processes & Practices

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents >
Part H. Cultural Competence, Spirituality, and the Arts a... >
Chapter 27. Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World >
Section 11. Building Inclusive Communities >
Main Section - Introduction, what, why, when, who, and how. >

<<< BACK TO TOC

Building Inclusive Communities

Main Section

Contributed by Kien Lee Edited by Bill Berkowitz and Jerry Schultz

What is an inclusive community?

Why is building an inclusive community important?

When should you build an inclusive community?

How do you build an inclusive community?

The information in this section is based on previous work by Chavis, Lee, and Buchanan (2001). This work was supported, in part, by grants from the Ford Foundation, Mott Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and American Psychological Association.

Global changes and natural disasters have led to the migration of people to different communities all over the world. Communities that were once fairly homogeneous are experiencing large influx of newcomers from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

A community that feels threatened by its growing diversity or is at a loss about what to do with the newcomers is at risk for all kinds of harmful confrontations--including riots. Consider a community that went from being primarily European American to being a multicultural community. When the new members started to move into the community, the existing organizations, which reflected the dominant culture, did nothing to change the way they go about doing their business. One day, an African American boy who was attempting to cross the street was killed by a drunk driver who happened to be of European descent. The driver did not get the punishment that the African Americans in the community felt he deserved. The boy's family, friends, and other African American citizens staged a protest in front of the city hall. Feelings of injustice were already on the rise. When a European American citizen walked by the protest and made a derogatory comment, a fight broke out and before they knew it, there was a riot.

Could the violence have been prevented? Most likely, if there had been structures and processes in the community to ensure that all its citizens were treated equally and fairly. Such negative incidents, which have happened before and continue to occur in some communities, demonstrate how important it is for us to build an inclusive community.

What is an inclusive community?

An inclusive community is a community that:		**Example:**

- Does everything that it can to respect all its citizens, gives them full access to resources, and promotes equal treatment and opportunity.
- Works to eliminate all forms of discrimination.
- Engages all its citizens in decision-making processes that affect their lives.
- Values diversity.
- Responds quickly to racist and other discriminating incidents.

Why is building an inclusive community important?

There are many reasons why an inclusive community is important. Here are a few examples:

- Acts of exclusion and injustice based on group identity and other factors should not be allowed to occur and/or continue.
- Each person has the right to be part of decisions that affect their lives and the groups they belong to.
- Diversity enriches our lives, so it is worth our while to value our community's diversity.

In 1995, the city of Clarksburg in West Virginia experienced a demographic change when the FBI's Fingerprint Identification Services Division moved into the community, bringing along with it more than 2,000 African American employees. One day, a young European American man burned a cross on the lawn of an African American FBI employee's house. This incident made the citizens of Clarksburg realize that it was important to build a community that appreciated its new diversity so that such acts of hate don't occur again. Hence, Clarksburg began its journey towards building an inclusive community. The story of Clarksburg is told in M. Potapchuk's book Steps Toward an Inclusive Community.

When should you build an inclusive community?

An inclusive community can be built at any time. The need to have an inclusive community, however, is most obvious when there has been a decision or an incident that caused harm to a particular group of people.

It is important to consider the motivation behind an individual, a group, or a community's desire to build an inclusive community because the motivation affects the following:

- Types and sequence of strategies selected-if there had been a crisis, you might have to start with a strategy that transforms the conflict. If there was no crisis, but it was a vision that a community leader had, you might consider starting with a public education campaign.
- Resources available-more resources could be mobilized if the motivation came from a large institution or a local foundation.
- Amount of support and obstruction-if the dominant group in the community was just as motivated as any other group, there is likely to be more support. If, however, the dominant group has no interest in changing the status quo, there is likely to be more barriers.
- Rate of progress-if the major leaders and groups supported the effort, progress is likely to be faster.
  Expected outcomes-if the motivation is to raise awareness, everyone involved is likely to be satisfied if they learned new things about other groups. If the motivation is to promote fair treatment of every group, everyone involved is likely to be satisfied if there was policy change.
- Expected outcomes-if the motivation is to raise awareness, everyone involved is likely to be satisfied if they learned new things about other groups. If the motivation is to promote fair treatment of every group, everyone involved is likely to be satisfied if there was policy change.

1. **Do your homework and gather information about the community.** (Also see Chapter 3 Section 2, Understanding and Describing the Community.)

Find out what major groups belong to the community and their history (i.e., length of residence, migration patterns, changes in political, economic, and social status)
There are a couple of ways to do this.

You can start by contacting the local government agencies and planning groups. You could also check out the Census Bureau's website (www.census.gov), look on the web homepage of the city or county, consult the National Neighborhood Indicators Project (www.urban.org/nnip/) read the local community newspapers, drive and walk around the community and pay attention to social activities, housing developments and conditions, street life, etc., attend community activities and talk to people, and meet with local community leaders.

Keep in mind:
You may be perceived by the community as representing the organization that hired you to gather the information, or as favoring the identity group that you may be associated with. One way to overcome this perception is to work closely with community citizens that represent different groups. Attend meetings and events with them.

Observe and ask about the characteristics that distinguish the groups from one another.
Such characteristics could include cultural tradition and ethnicity, socioeconomic class, employment categories, and/or religion.

Learn about the social organization of the different groups, including their social points, support networks, and major institutions (see Chapter 27, Section 10 for tips on finding out about a group's social organization). Identify the major events (e.g., political, social, and economic) that affected the community. This could include the election of a new mayor who does not value the community's diversity, the closing down of a major factory which caused many residents to become unemployed, the establishment of a casino, or the expansion of a mental health center. Consider the links between such events and other changes in the community. Pay special attention to how these events affected the major groups in the community.	**Tip:** How do you determine if you have heard from every major group in an equitable way? • Conduct the same number of interviews or discussions with each major group. • You could conduct a survey and ask group members to name their top most influential leaders, and then speak to those leader

Identify and attend the events that signify the traditions of the community. Such events could give you insights into whether or not the community values its diversity, what is important to the community, and which group is most visible and valued. They could also provide an ideal forum for distributing information and demonstrating change.

2. Engage the most influential leaders representing the major groups in the community from the beginning to provide guidance.

Convene a community council comprised of influential leaders from different groups to help you review, analyze, and summarize the information that you gathered before. (See Chapter 27 Section 10 for tips on identifying a group's leaders through their social networks.) Be sure to identify both cultural resources and assets as well as needs.

The process of convening this community council is an important consideration when you are working with two or more racial, ethnic, and cultural groups to build an inclusive community. Consider carefully the history of exclusion and power differences. See Tool #1 for a guide on establishing a diverse community advisory board or council. **3. Work with the community council to identify potential entry points and/or strategies for building an inclusive community.** Consider the way in which a problem or concern was raised and described by different groups and their leaders and the groups that may be associated with being the perpetrators, victims, or by-standers of exclusive practices. This information will give you a sense of the individuals or leaders who are most ready for change and those who are most resistant to change. **4. Bring together people representing different groups as equals in terms of power, respect, and importance.** Make sure that all groups involved are considered as equals. Processes and procedures, formal or informal, must be put in place to ensure that people are treated equally and that decisions are made collaboratively. A simple and common example is how language differences are dealt with during meetings and other forms of interaction.	**Tip:** You may find that the community has a list of concerns. In order to prioritize which common concern should be addressed first, you could consider: • The concern that impacts the most number of groups. • The potential consequences, if the concern is not addressed. • The feasibility and practicality of addressing and resolving the concern. • Results from past polls and formal surveys. A common goal helps groups understand that they share certain desires or goals, which compels them to work together rather than against each other

5. Create opportunities for members of different groups to identify and share their similarities and differences.

By getting to know someone as an individual, there is less of a tendency to perceive another group as monolithic and homogenous. This allows members of groups to recognize that even though they may differ in one aspect, they may share a common identity on another. (See Chapter 27 Section 6 for tips on creating such opportunities.)

Find a phrase that appeals to all the groups (e.g., "better quality of life," "safe streets") and facilitate discussions about the meaning of that phrase to each person and each group. Build in time for informal social opportunities to talk, share a meal, etc. as part of these discussions.

Coordinate activities and events to celebrate the community's diversity.

Educate the different groups and the larger community about conditions and forces that help shape a group's identity and current situation. This is essential because otherwise, groups can end up appreciating their similarities only and ignoring the structural factors (e.g., institutionalized racism) that underlie and perpetuate their differences. If the root causes for such differences are not recognized and addressed, the change that comes about from your effort will be superficial or shortsighted.

6. Allow for the identification of each group's assets and use and exchange them as part of your effort. Assets in this context refer to the values, traditions, historical events, art forms, language structure, and other characteristics that make a group of people proud about their identity. Find opportunities for this type of exchange to occur throughout your effort. For example, you could create such opportunities for members of the community council and during other community discussions. You could work with the editor of the local newspaper to publish a series of articles about the assets of each major group in the community, or you could also work with a popular radio station to allocate an hour a week to share such information. Use such exchanges as a way to point out misinformed stereotypes or perceptions.	**Example:** Albuquerque Project Change (APC) in New Mexico was launched in 1991 to build an inclusive community in Albuquerque by promoting equal access to economic resources for people of color in the city. One of the issues identified by the Project was unfair lending practices and poor outreach by local financial institutions to people of color in the city. Through community partnerships among different groups, anti-racism training for community groups and financial institutions, and a strong community task force, the Project was able to get local banks to commit to low-interest rates and flexible underwriting that benefited low-income groups of color. For more information, check out Project Change's website at www.projectchange.org

7. Identify, respect, and transform conflicts into improved capacity and relations in the community.

Conflict between two or more groups may be unavoidable if they don't understand or appreciate each other's cultures, have misinformed or negative stereotypes about each other, and/or compete with each other for resources and power.

Recognize that different groups have their own way of dealing with conflict. Some cultures encourage their members to conform, while other cultures encourage their members to challenge the forces that impinge on their rights. The goal is not to do away with conflict, because that is an impossible task, but rather to use conflict in a constructive way to develop people's capacity to work together. (Chapter 27, Section 9 provides practical tips on how to identify and transform conflicts.)

Consider hiring an outside facilitator who can work with you and the community council throughout the effort to transform conflicts. Recognize that the potential facilitator's perceived group identity (could be any characteristic from a physical trait to something less visible) could have a positive or a negative effect on the process. Make sure you, the potential facilitator, and the community council discuss this concern before actually getting down to work.

8. Ensure institutional support for promoting inclusion, equity, and justice. Equity means that everyone has equal access to economic, social, and educational opportunity. Justice means we uphold fair treatment and due reward in accordance with honor, standards, or law. Support from institutions (e.g., local governments, schools, community networks, faith groups, the media) are essential for creating an environment that supports your community effort. Because of the status, power, resources, and relationships that these institutions have, they could either sanction or obstruct your effort. Identify and engage institutional leaders in your effort, if they are not already part of the community council. You could make presentations about your effort or invite them to participate in an event or activity. Find a way to show the institution how it could benefit by valuing and including all of the major groups.	**Example:** The South Orange/Maplewood Coalition on Race in New Jersey is advised by a board of institutional leaders in the two communities. Through its multilevel strategies, the Coalition has been able to initiate pro-integrative strategies that value the racial diversity of the two communities and prevent re-segregation. Its efforts have resulted in institutional practices that ensure inclusion and equity for all the racial and ethnic groups that live there. For more information about its work, contact the coalition at

	(973) 761-6116 or check out their website at www.twotowns.org.

9. Acknowledge and celebrate successful collective action.

Successful collective action not only improves a community, but it also strengthens the groups' relationships. It reinforces the positive experience and outcome of working together. Groups are more likely to want to work together again.

Take time to acknowledge and celebrate even the smallest accomplishment. For example, on a smaller scale, the council members could have dinner together at a restaurant. The council could also make an award to the groups that were part of the success.

On a larger scale, an organization that played a big part in the success could host an open house and invite leaders and members of all the groups to join in the celebration. Invite an important person in the community (e.g., the mayor, school superintendent, faith leader) to inaugurate the event. Write an article for the local newspaper.

In the acknowledgement and celebration, point out the fact that success was possible because the groups built on their strengths, appreciated their diversity, and worked together on a common issue.

10. Sustain the relationships, strategies, and changes at multiple levels, including the individual, group, and institutional levels. Building an inclusive community is not an event that has a beginning and an end. It is a process that continuously evolves. Sometimes, it may feel like the community made three steps forward and then took two steps backward. Or, you had three successful actions and six ineffective attempts. What is considered successful and progress versus failure and regression depends on the individual, group, and institution. Regardless of where you stand, it is important to sustain the relationships, strategies, and changes, no matter how minor or insignificant they may seem to be because they become the tools for managing the process of building an inclusive community. Create opportunities to maintain frequent contact and cooperation among the groups. For example, if three groups came together to start a new multicultural afterschool program and it was successful, encourage them to institutionalize the program. This could mean hiring a grant writer to identify additional funds to continue the program. Establish a task force or committee that could serve as a "watchdog" to hold institutions accountable to changes that affect inclusion.	**Keep in mind:** Efforts to build an inclusive community are sometimes conceived in either-or terms. In other words, the effort either focuses on dialogue OR action; assets OR needs; race OR class; individuals OR institutions; social relationships OR neighborhood improvement. The tools and resources that are available also tend to emphasize one focus or the other. While it is not wrong to choose one strategy or focus over another, it is preferable to implement a comprehensive effort that operates on multiple levels-individual, group, and institution.

Establish a task force or committee that could serve as a "watchdog" to hold institutions accountable to changes that affect inclusion.

Encourage leaders who understand and work towards inclusion, equity, and justice to run for office.

TO SUM IT UP:

The work of building inclusive communities is not easy; results will not occur overnight. It takes time, patience, perseverance, and courage, because this work is about transforming attitudes, behaviors, and policies. It requires strategies that operate at multiple levels, including the individual, group, and institutional levels.

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Organizations:

Applied Research Center
3781 Broadway
Oakland, CA 94611
Phone: (510) 653-3415
www.arc.org

Center for Third World Organizing
1218 E. 21st Street
Oakland, CA 94606
Phone: (510) 533-7583
Fax: (510) 533-0923
www.ctwo.org

Southern Poverty Law Center
400 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, Alabama 36104
Phone: (334) 956-8200
www.splcenter.org

Internet:

www.jointcenter.org/nabre. Network of Alliances Bridging Race and Ethnicity (NABRE) is a project of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. This website enables leaders of organizations that are working towards racial equity and justice to communicate across the country through online seminars, chat rooms, and shared access resources.

www.racematters.org. This website is a resource especially for South Florida, but it also contains information for anyone seeking progress in racial reconciliation.

Other:

ColorLines, the first national, multi-racial magazine devoted to covering the politics and creations of communities of color, published by the Applied Research Center. Check out their website at www.arc.org/C_Lines/ for subscription information.

The Television Race Initiative (TRI), a project of American Documentary, Inc., works with national and community-based organizations to use storytelling-initially in the form of several public television broadcasts-to 'break the ice' and encourage essential conversations that lead to constructive action. You can contact the Initiative at 2601 Mariposa Street, 3rd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94110, phone: 415-553-2841, www.pbs.org/pov/tvraceinitiative.

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Table of Contents | Links | Troubleshooting Guide | Toolkits | Best Processes & Practices

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents >
Part H. Cultural Competence, Spirituality, and the Arts a... >
Chapter 27. Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World >
Section 9. Transforming Conflicts in Diverse Communities >
Main Section - Introduction, what, why, when, who, and how. >

<<< BACK TO TOC

Transforming Conflicts in Diverse Communities

Main Section

Contributed by Kien Lee Edited by Bill Berkowitz and Jerry Schultz

What is conflict transformation?

Why is transforming conflicts in diverse communities important?

How can conflicts be transformed?

What are some of the challenges in transforming conflicts?

What is conflict transformation?

Conflicts are natural parts of our lives. Some people tend to shy away from conflict, while others tend to confront them. Some cultures encourage their members to conform, while others encourage their members to challenge.

Conflicts can occur between two or more individuals because of differences in personality, values, and opinions. When this type of conflict happens, conflict resolution techniques can be employed to help the parties find a peaceful solution to a disagreement. When the conflict is resolved, the two parties may walk away feeling somewhat or very satisfied. (See Chapter 20, Section 6, Training for Conflict Resolution.)

Conflicts can also occur between two or more organizations or community groups. These conflicts are no longer just about individual differences, but also about divisions perpetuated by ignorance and intolerance, oppression, and a history of fear and animosity. In such cases, conflict resolution between individuals may not be enough. The groups affected not only have to reconcile their differences, they also have to strengthen their ability to value each other, build alliances, and find common ground in order to change the systems that might be supporting their division. They have to transform their conflicts!

Conflict transformation, therefore, is the process whereby conflict is both resolved and used to build the capacity of groups to develop alliances that value equitable relationships, promote harmony, and effect systems change.

Why is transforming conflicts in diverse communities important?

In a diverse community composed of two or more ethnic, or cultural groups, conflicts are more likely to occur because of:

- Differences in group identity, which is shaped by the group's cultural values, history, socioeconomic status, and perceived power.
- History of hostile interaction and discrimination.

- Misinformed stereotypes and perceptions caused by prejudiced attitudes and other external influences (e.g., the media).

Transforming conflicts that result from these reasons takes time, patience, humility, a long-term commitment, and a willingness to trust and to take the risk of making mistakes. But the effort is well worth it because diversity enriches our lives and our communities, and diversity is not something you can eliminate. Global changes as a result of natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes), war, economic downturns, and other factors cause different groups of people to move in and out of countries, states, cities, and communities. Conflict is dynamic and always evolving. Therefore, it is important to be able to transform conflicts to create and sustain stronger alliances and communities.

How can conflicts be transformed?

There are four basic steps to transforming conflict. Within each step, different methods can be used move the process toward a positive outcome. Remember, transforming conflict is a process, not a single event or activity. In practice, it is not always clear as to which step you and your group may be in. You may spend a lot of time working on one step before moving to the next step. You and several others may be ready to move to the next step, but the rest of the group may not. When this happens, don't try and move ahead without everyone. Try and work together to figure out what is holding some of the groups back and what it would take to move forward together. The most important function of these steps is to provide you with a general framework and direction for your effort and to remind you of certain components that have to be considered during the process.

1. All groups that are affected by the conflict should acknowledge that there is a problem and commit to working together to deal with the conflict. 2. The root causes of the conflict should be identified, made explicit, and reconciled collectively by the groups. 3. The groups involved should develop a common vision for what they can do together and how they can do it. 4. The groups should determine what they need in order to sustain their ability to continue to work together to manage or eliminate the causes of the conflict, and to promote peace.	***Summary of steps:*** • Acknowledge • Reconcile • Envision and • Strategize • Sustain

Acknowledgement: Acknowledging the conflict is the first step to resolving it. Though not an easy step, especially when history and bad relationships have led to painful experiences such as insults or death. Some react by distancing themselves from the conflict, or actively oppose the other group as their solution to it. Some deny their participation in the continuing to keep the conflict alive. Acknowledging that there is a problem and that other, perhaps better, ways to handle the problem are tough but vital first steps. Without acknowledgement no one will commit to working to solve the problem. These are important in being able to move to the next step of reconciling differences.

What are some of the techniques for helping groups acknowledge the problem and commit to working together?

• Facilitate a dialog between groups clarifying the conflict • Present information to the groups to show them how they are all affected by a particular issue and how it serves their purpose to work together, or create a safe place where that dialog can be held. • Bring leaders together who will publicly declare that its time to deal with the issues rather than let a bad situation get worse. • Hold sessions with group leaders to discuss the importance of reconciliation. • Help draft a public commitment statement where groups promise to try to work out their differences.	***Keep in mind:*** Acknowledge and include the cultural traditions and resources that can contribute to or obstruct conflict transformation. For example, language differences can obstruct the process. At the same time, the social networks in a group that allows information to be spread quickly by word of mouth can be a resource for sharing knowledge.

Can you think of any other ways to help the different groups in your community acknowledge the problem, commit to working together, and identify the root causes of their conflict?

Illustrative Hypothetical Example:
Latino and African American parents are blaming each other's group for their children's poor performance in school. At recent public events tempers have flared and accusations exchanged. Some parents are afraid that worse things might happen at the school. The African American parents feel that the non-English speaking students are taking the teachers' time away from their children, consequently, their children are not learning. The Latino parents feel that the teachers are too busy offering risk prevention activities to the African American children, consequently their children are not getting adequate attention. A community organization was asked by the Latino parents to do something about the problem. The community builder collected information about all the students' performance. The community builder recognized that being Latino himself may not help the African American parents to trust him. So, he worked closely

with an African American colleague and used their partnership as an example for cross-cultural collaboration. The two of them held separate meetings with both groups of parents. During each meeting they presented the achievement information and asked the participants to share their views about their goals and dreams for their children and their perceptions of the conflict and each other. They gathered together representatives from each of the groups and facilitated a dialog between the groups clarifying and sharing their perceptions of the conflict. The groups discussed the consequences of continuing conflict and how it would hurt their communities and children. The groups also imagined a variety of possible solutions that didn't entail conflict. The groups issues a joint statement that they would hold a series of meetings to try resolve the conflict and sought community participation. They declared a personal and spiritual commitment to reaching that end.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation is an important part of the conflict transformation process. Reconciliation is difficult to define, but common themes include making amends and offering restoration in order to bring groups back together. The process may include offerings of reparation and redistribution as part of healing and that there may be victims and perpetrators. There is often a need to forgive. With community reconciliation there may be a sense of community brokenness that needs repair. Those who have committed some wrongs may seek some form of repentance and absolution of wrongdoing is sometimes sought. It also suggests that an atmosphere is created that allows for participants to move past their differences.

- Reconciliation requires that two or more groups develop trusting friendships, identify underlying causes of their conflict, work together to develop a common mission, and promote equity and justice. Reconciliation helps members of the conflicting groups to:
- See each other as individuals and not just as representatives of their group.
- Admit that injustice exists based on group differences.
- Make a personal and collective commitment to social change.
- Envision the future by coming together on common ground, while respecting people's rights to maintain their cultural traditions and values.
- Develop strategies to address structural racism (for a more detailed explanation of structural racism, see Chapter 27 Section 4: Strategies for Reducing Racism).

There are various ways to do this, including:

- Create an intimate atmosphere for members of the groups to "eat, sleep, and play" together. Religious congregations that have diverse membership have played a key role in creating such an environment.
- Ask members of all the groups to share a story about their experiences with injustice. Sharing stories is an effective method to help dispel stereotypes and to personalize each group's positive and negative experiences due to their group identity. You can use a speak-out technique (see chapter 27 section 2, Building Relationships with People from Different Cultures) or a fish-bowl method where one group meets in the center and talks about their views on the conflict while the other groups sit in an outer circle to watch and listen, and then all the groups come together to discuss their observations and experiences.
- Convene the groups that are involved in the conflict to discuss what they thought were the cause of their conflict and to identify what they could do together to address the problem.
- Launch a public education campaign that raises awareness about the root causes of the conflict (e.g., disparities between African Americans and European Americans due to institutionalized racism that perpetuates unequal treatment of the groups) and invite people to step forward to help eliminate the causes.
- Conduct an analysis of the structural relationships that contribute to the conflict (e.g., relationship between the lack of culturally competent mental healthcare and increased mental disorders among the Vietnamese refugee community).
- Invite the groups to participate in cross-group perceptions exercise (e.g., ask each group to meet and pool ideas about how they view themselves, how they view another group, and how they think another group perceives them; use the information gathered to identify questions and lessons learned). (See chapter 27 section 3 on Healing From the Effects of Internalized Oppression and Section 5 on Learning to be An Ally to People From Diverse Groups and Backgrounds).

J. Perkins gives a great example in the book Restoring At-Risk Communities:

In a neighborhood where African and European Americans live side by side, the Voice of Calvary (VOC) church had an interracial congregation where a European American pastor shouted out sermons like an African American preacher. In a series of meetings among congregation members one year, the African American members accused some of the European American members of being racist and argued that VOC's goal was to develop African American leadership and not otherwise. Consequently, they wanted the European American leaders to step aside. This exchange caused many European and African Americans to leave the church. A handful of members from both races decided to stay and work out their differences when they realized that racial hurt and injustice was not any one group's problem, but everyone's problem. Through a small Bible study group, these members got to know one another, create a trusting environment for honest exchange, and share their commonalities. They learned to unload their ethnic and cultural baggage. For example, a European American member came to understand that when the

African Americans said, "Step to the side," he heard "step back." Consequently, the European Americans who were used to being in charge felt threatened because they thought that they were being dominated, when in fact, a true partnership between the two groups was the goal. People from both groups had to "own" their feelings and be uncomfortable expressing them. The discomfort was inevitable and was not regarded as negative by either parties. This exchange led to a realization that most of their church elders were seminary-educated European Americans and even though an African American minister had played a leadership role in the church, he was never made an elder because he had no formal education. The group had to consider carefully how the church supported the leadership of the African American community.

It is important, as part of the conflict transformation process, to think ahead about the future. Remember, it is not just about resolving the conflict, but transforming the conflict in a way that results in an infrastructure to promote harmony and support equity in the community. You could conduct a "visioning" event or conference to provide the groups with a safe space for them to imagine, share, and articulate what they think is possible by working together across groups. This visioning process helps people to see how they share a common and connected future, and it gives people a chance to develop strategies for individual and collective action. It links their image of the future to concrete steps that they could take to make that image come alive. You could ask participants to develop individual action plans for themselves and collective plans for two or more groups. It is critical that highly-skilled facilitators are engaged to conduct the visioning process in order to manage conflict and ensure that the participants move from dialogue to action. See Chapter 8, Developing a Strategic Plan to learn about community visioning and action planning. Future search is also a popular technique for community visioning. It brings together large numbers of people to plan and transform the plans into action and specific tasks.

During the visioning process, the following questions are essentially asked:

- Where are we now?
- Where are we going?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there?
- What can we do individually and collectively?

Sustain: The effort will face many barriers that challenge its success. What are some ways for ensuring that the transformed conflicts and strengthened alliances can be sustained?

- Leadership support--Engage all levels of leadership (top, middle, and grassroots) in the process.
- Change agents--Establish and train a committee, task force, or special commission of change agents representing all the groups that are in conflict to call out and transform potential conflicts. (see resource list for training resources).
- Information dissemination--Use all forms of media that appeal to the different groups (e.g., street theater, radio, television, music, ethnic newspaper) to continuously distribute images that show people from the conflicting groups working together.
- Evaluation--Evaluate, on a regular basis, the results of the alliances that have been strengthened through the conflict transformation process (e.g., new activities, projects, or resources that came about because of people working together across racial, ethnic, and cultural groups) (see Chapter 38, Some Methods for Evaluating Comprehensive Community initiatives)
- Reflection and revisioning-Use the evaluation results to revisit the community's vision and to identify any necessary adjustments for future planning and actions.

Hint:
Develop multicultural teams throughout the conflict transformation process. These teams should include at least one person who is an "insider" to a group and one person who is considered an "outsider." This composition helps to neutralize any misperceptions of favoritism or bias, and models the behavior desired in the community. In some communities, an "outsider" sometimes brings credibility to an effort, especially if it is someone affiliated with a mainstream institution. An "insider" on the other hand, ensures that the group's cultural traditions and value are respected.

The conflict transformation process can be summarized as one that moves people from reality to their desired future through a series of well-planned and intentional steps that began with an acknowledgement of injustice. The following table lays out the process with specific questions that can be used to guide the process strategies for each stage (adapted from Lederach, 1997).

What is happening today? Where is the conflict?	Who and what institutions need to be included in order to transform the conflict?	What does the future look like?

• Which racial, ethnic, or cultural groups are immediately affected? • If the conflict is not addressed, what are the consequences for each group? • What are the most urgent needs? • How is the conflict affected by the local political, social, and economic systems? • What existing resources can be used at the top, middle, and grassroots leadership? • What existing cultural traditions and resources can help or obstruct the conflict transformation proce	• Who are or has the greatest potential to be a bridge builder and change agent? • Who has respect, linkages, and knowledge within each racial, ethnic, or cultural group? • What additional knowledge and skills do the bridge builders, change agents, and leaders need to work across groups and to prepare for reconciliatio	• What key social networks (see Chapter 28, Section 1) and organizations are or have the greatest potential for sustaining the alliances across groups and the infrastructure for transforming conflicts and promoting peace in the futur	• What is the long-term vision for a diverse and harmonious community? • Who are the keepers of this vision (e.g., the media, elected leaders)? • What systemic changes are needed to achieve and support the vision? • What mechanisms exist or need to be developed to ensure that all the groups are included in decision- and policymakin
Tools for Understanding • Listening sessions • Applied research • Power analysis • Public education campaign • Speak-outs • Caucusing • Fish-b	**Tools for Building Community** • Community organizing • Leadership developmen • Assets-mapping		**Tools for Supporting the effort** • Community visioning • Coalition building • Community advisory board • Anti-racism workshops • Evaluat

For those of you who work in diverse communities, you know that transforming conflicts is not an easy task. There are many challenges that can delay or obstruct the process. It is important for you and others to know what they are before you even embark on the journey. If you are not prepared to deal with challenges, your effort could end up creating expectations that cannot be met and consequently, discourage community leaders and residents for further collaboration in the future.

What are some of the challenges in transforming conflicts?

It takes a lot of time and resources.

Don't underestimate the number of people who are committed and willing to volunteer for small tasks. As an example, the Akron Beacon Journal in Akron, Ohio, published a year-long series of articles related to racial disparities in response to the tensions felt by the cities' residents after the 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles. As part of the articles, a mail-in coupon was included asking people and corporations who wanted to build a harmonious community to step forward. The response from the community was overwhelming; hence the Coming Together Project was conceived.

The forces that work against reconciliation, coalition building, and systems change are so overwhelming that it is easy to give up after an unsuccessful attempt to transform a conflict.

Break the strategies into smaller and more manageable tasks. Develop collective and individual action plans for each member and each group. Build in time to celebrate small successes.

Language is a major barrier when bringing together people who have limited or no proficiency in the English language with English-only speakers.

You, as the community builder, have to help the groups that are involved in the conflict recognize that language plays a role in maintaining power differences. Not understanding the dominant language decreases access to information and information is power. There are at least two ways for handling this challenge. First, hire and ask translators to translate

out loud after each person speaks. This method gets to be a little cumbersome if there are more than two languages involved. Second, purchase simultaneous translation equipment. You still have to hire translators, but the time is decreased because of the simultaneous translation. It is more efficient to use this equipment when you have more than two languages because some of the transmitters allow up to six channels for different languages.

TO SUM IT UP:

Conflict transformation is important in diverse communities to resolve conflicts and to promote peace among groups of different race, ethnicity, and culture. It is a process that takes time, patience, humility, a long-term commitment, and a willingness to trust and to take risks. The key components of the process are: to acknowledge the problem and to commit to working together, to identify the root causes of the conflict and to reconcile group differences, to develop a common and connected future, and to develop sustainable strategies and actions.

Resources:

Print:

Chang, H., Louie, N., Murdock, B., Pell, E., & Femenella, T. (2000). Walking the walk. Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow.

Gutlove, P. (1998). Health bridges for peace: integrating health care with community reconciliation. Medicine, Conflict, and Survival, 14, 6-23.

Lederach, J.P. (1997). Building peace. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Loderach, J.P, (1996). Preparing for peace: conflict transformation across cultures. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Perkins, J. & Rice, C. (1995). Reconciliation: Loving God and loving people. In Perkins, J. (Ed.). Restoring at-risk communities (pp. 107-138). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Rothman, J. (1997). Resolving identity-based conflict in nations, organizations, and communities. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

On-line Resources:

www.sustainable.org
The Sustainable Communities Network is for those who want to help make their communities more livable. It covers a wide range of topics related to building healthy communities.

www.futuresearch.net
This site explains the theories behind Future Search and the steps for conducting a community visioning process.

Training:

Alliance for Conflict Transformation
P. O. Box 3203
Fairfax, VA 22038
Telephone: 703-691-2261
www.conflictransformation.org

Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation, Inc.
37 West 65th
2nd Floor
New York, NY 10023
www.transformativemediation.org

CONTACT- Conflict Transformation Across Cultures
School for International Training
Kipling Road, P.O. Box 676
Brattleboro, VT 05302-02678
Phone: 802-258-3433
www.sit.edu/contact/

The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond
1444 North Johnson Street
New Orleans, LA 70116
Phone: 504-944-2354

www.thepeoplesinstitute.org
(For information on structural racism and power analysis)

Madii Institute
22218 Chaparral Lane
Rogers, MN 55374
Phone: 763-498-8429
www.madii.org
(For assets-based community transformation)

Community Organizations:

Multicultural Collaborative
315 W 9th St.
315
Los Angeles, CA 90015
Phone: 213-624-7992
Fax: 213-624-7924
www.mcc-la.org

Coming Together Project
1301 Firestone Parkway
Akron, OH 44309-1543
Phone: 330-379-3832
Fax: 330-379-3834
www.comingtogether.org

Palmetto Project
P.O. Box 506
Charleston, SC 20402
Phone: 843-577-4122
Fax: 843-723-0521
www.palmettoproject.org

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Go

Table of Contents | Do the Work | Solve a Problem | Use Promising Approaches | Connect with Others | Services
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